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Sohaib Kamal Al-Kamal

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**THE ORIENTALISM OF EDGAR ALLAN POE: THE ALLURE OF THE  
MIDDLE EAST IN *AL-AARAAF***

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, English

By

Sohaib Kamal Mahmood Al-Kamal

July 2015

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the Orientalist discourse in four of Edgar Allan Poe's poems and two of his prose essays. The major aspects of Orientalism examined in Poe's works rely on the theoretical ideas of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and other ideas developed by important Arab writers. Said and other Arab writers agree that Islam is the locus of any study of Orientalism. This thesis focuses on the major role of Oriental imagery that it plays Poe's early poems. It also examines two of his prose essays to help understand central aspects of Poe's orientalia which are also reflected in his poems. The thesis centers on the elements of Oriental exoticism, Qur'anic imagery, Middle Eastern geography, ancient cities, local traditions, and intertextual relationships. The body of the thesis is mainly made up of three parts. The first part gives a brief survey of the definition of Orientalism and the role it played in the relationship between the West and the East throughout history. The second part throws light on the Orientalist reading of Edgar Allan Poe's two essays "Review of Stephen's Arabia Petraea" and "Palaestine" and his three poems: *Israfel*, *To Helen*, and *The Doomed City*. The third part extensively explores Poe's abstruse poem *Al-Aaraaf* throughout the lens of the theory of Orientalism.

**KEYWORDS:** Edward Said, Travis Montgomery, Edgar Allan Poe, Jeffrey Einboden, Orientalism, Islamicism, Middle Eastern literature, literary borrowings, anti-traditionalism.

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Dr. James S. Baumlin  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
Missouri State University

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July 2015

Approved:

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I dedicate this thesis to my beloved, late Mom.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis will explore the role that Oriental imagery and the allure of the Middle East play in Poe's poetry, particularly in his most enigmatic poem *Al-Aaraaf*. Copious Qur'anic imagery is dispersed over Poe's poems, short stories, and prose essays. This can be explained by Poe's reading of the Qur'an in the translation made by the Orientalist George Sale in 1734. And Poe's interest in things Arabic and Islamic were not unique to him. As Jeffrey Einboden notes, the Qur'an was standard reading among American writers of the Federalist period:

Qur'anic quotations are to be found diffused throughout the texts of America's literary patriarchs, permeating the public works and private papers of not only Emerson, but also contemporaries, successors and rivals such as Washington Irving (1783-1859) and Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), building an architecture of Islamic allusion within the very foundations of early US letters. (2)

Whereas some American authors turned to the Qur'an in their maturity, Poe turned to it in his youth. Hence, the Qur'an, as Einboden explains, plays an important role in Poe's early poetic development. Indeed, Poe's poetry is "indebted not only to Islamic reference, but to specifically Qur'anic allusion" (7).

Since this thesis focuses on Poe's understanding and use of Arabic, Islamic, and Qur'anic literary culture, it is important to establish an interpretative context for Orientalism. American literary scholarship has embraced Orientalism as both a subject of study and an interpretive practice; it has a body of scholarship surrounding it and virtually all anthologies of American criticism acknowledge the importance of both the subject and the interpretive practice. However, for most American students of literature



Orientalism “begins and ends with” the critical writings of Edward Said (1935-2003). Said is, indeed, an important voice in Orientalist criticism. But his is not the only voice worth listening to. So, what I wish to add to the American “scholarly conversation” is an acknowledgment of some of the more salient Arabic-language scholarship, which remains inaccessible to non-Arabic speakers. And my first observation in this regard is that contemporary scholars working in Arabic have their own vision as to what constitutes Orientalism, both as a topic and as a literary-interpretive method. In *Alistishraq wa Manhajiat Alnaqid inda Almuslimeen Almuasreen* [Orientalism and the Methodology of Criticism for the Contemporary Moslems], Alsayad Mohammad Alshahid argues that the field of Orientalism should belong to, or at least be led by, scholars who are themselves Arab and Islamic in cultural-intellectual background.

Malik Bin Nabi, a fellow Arab writer, agrees with Alshahid in placing Islam at the heart of any definition of Orientalism. Defining Orientalism, Bin Nabi writes, “by Orientalism [,we mean the literary practice of] Western writers who write about Islamic thought and the Islamic civilization” (130). In other words, Orientalism is the study of the Arab Middle East as seen (or as imagined) through Western eyes. Though English-language scholarship in Orientalism does place an emphasis on Islam in the field of Orientalism, the question arises as to the accuracy (and, hence, reliability and utility) of this scholarship. Indeed, this very question remains fiercely debated by Arab scholars. In his controversial book, *Alistishraq fi Almizan* [Decoding Orientalism], Munther Almaleeqi—one of the Arab world’s lead authorities on Orientalism—finds several attitudes prevalent among fellow Arab writers. Arabs who study the Orientalist themes in Western literature fall into two categories in particular. One group defends the efforts of

those English-language Orientalists whose works introduced a version of Arab and Islamic culture to the West. A second critiques the efforts of these Orientalists. This second group argues that Orientalism became subservient to colonialism— that is, to the subjugation of Arab and Islamic culture to Western political and economic interests. Though Edward Said (1935-2003) can be put in this second of Almaleeqi's categorization, Said's version of Orientalism is, in fact, more nuanced than simply pro- or anti-West. Though Said does explore the Western imperialism lurking within Orientalist literature, his definition of Orientalism includes other major aspects, such as compelling romance stories, exotic elements, Oriental scenery, and attracting types of knowledge and unforgettable events (Leitch and Cain 1866).

Part of Poe's vision of the Middle East derives from the Orientalists who had written before him. These would include the British Romantic poets Thomas Moore, George Gordon, and the Lord Byron. As Edward Said observes, Orientalism had reached its height during the Romantic era— and Poe, as an American author writing in the literary generation after Byron, was an heir to this tradition. On the European Continent, Goethe and Hugo also contributed to the age of Orientalism. Such authors as these, Said writes, "restructured the Orient by their art and made its colors, lights, and people visible through their images, rhythms, and motifs... [and] Orientalism borrowed and was frequently informed by 'strong' ideas, doctrines, and trends ruling the culture" (1883). Thus, the enormous contributions of the European writers, particularly the Romantic writers helped to introduce the Near Orient to America, both culturally and literarily.

In *Borrowed Imagination: The British Romantic Poets and Their Arabic-Islamic Sources*, Samar Attar examines the powerful impact of the Arab and Islamic culture on

the Romantic Movement. She points to the popularity of *The Arabian Nights*, saying that “all Romantic read the book, or at least were familiar with few tales, including the frame-story” (4). This was a powerful influence as well: “It is not only Islam, *The Arabian Nights*, or *Hay Ibn Yaqzan* that might have excited the imagination of the English Romantic poets. Other resources were available to them in abundance: pre-Islamic poetry, Arabic history and literature, Muslim mystic poetry, and numerous oriental tales” (Attar 14).

In late 18th and early 19th century America, there was a growing awareness of the Near Orient and the religion of Islam. The Barbary Wars (1801-1805, 1815-1816), which pitted the young American navy against North African pirates, belonged to Poe’s parents’ generation more than to his own, since he was born in 1809. Still, the cultural memory of these wars was kept alive in popular literature: as Schueller writes, “U.S. - North African conflict of the late eighteenth century is evident in such works as Royall Tyler’s *The Algerian Captive* and Susanna Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers*” (ix).

Why are the Barbary Wars an important context for Poe? Because Americans had warfare as a counterweight against the idealized Orientalism of the British/European Romantic poets. As Timothy Marr observes in *The Cultural Roots of American Islamism*, the Near Orient was a point of controversy, especially in the American political arena, “during Poe’s early years” (10).

So, was the Near Orient of Poe’s culture a land of enchantment or a lair of pirates? During Poe’s lifetime, American Christians longed to visit the Middle East, especially the Holy Lands. But, here especially, Orientalism gets mixed up with colonialism: for most Americans, being Christians, strongly wished to see Palestine free

from the “Turkish Yoke”—as Poe himself described it in his essay, “Palaestine” (*Southern Literary Messenger* 152).

In this thesis, I will examine the representation of the Middle East on Poe’s two essays: “Palastine” and “Review of Stephen’s Arabia Petraea.” I will show Poe’s apparent prejudice towards the Islamic Orient in these two essays. I will discuss Poe’s fondness of the geography of the Middle East, especially of the Holy Lands and those regions that are referenced in the Bible. I will also apply an Oriental interpretation on four of Edgar Allan Poe’s poems, *Israfel*, *To Helen*, *The Doomed City*, and *Al-Aaraaf*. I will show how the Qur’anic imagery is diffused throughout these poems, especially *Al-Aaraaf* which is deeply indebted to the Qur’anic stories, imagery, and prophesies. Since I will be looking at four of Poe’s poems I will examine Poe’s divergence from the American philistinism, and in particular the followers of the British School Lake, a group of poets “represeneted by William Wordsworth” (Wang 83). In addition to the Qur’an, I will discuss the influence of Eastern literature on *Al-Aaraaf* represented by the Persian Sufi poet Saadi Shirazi (1210-1291), especially his famous book *Gulisten* or *Rose Garden*. I will discuss the ways that the Middle East’s ancient civilizations fired his poetic imagination. And I will examine some of the cultural traditions of the Arab Middle East, as reflected on Poe’s *Al-Aaraaf*. Poe would have learned of these traditions from several popular travelogues, including *A Voyage into the Levant* by Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656-1708) and *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* by François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848).

It is my contention that Poe’s Orientalism has not been sufficiently observed by scholars, whether Arab or English-speaking. Then again, the same can be said of the

Islamic sources underlying European Orientalism: for, as Attar states, “scholars continue to turn a blind eye to the oriental sources that were available to all Romantic writers in Europe, including Britain, in variety of translations” (7). Because the Orientalist discourse is broad in Poe’s works, this thesis is by no means an exhaustive survey; it does, nonetheless, sketch out the major aspects of Orientalism embedded in two of Poe’s essays and four of his poems. However, I would argue that these same Orientalist themes can be found lurking in other American writers who were later contemporaries to Poe—given the context of Orientalism in Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Walt Whitman.

While some scholars might argue that Poe turned to the Islamic civilization and the culture of the Middle East for their exoticism and “otherness,” I argue that Poe’s work demonstrates an appreciation for Islam and its surrounding culture. Poe’s turn to the culture and the civilizations of the Middle East not only new worlds of imagery, but also to introduce Oriental culture to American “traditionalists.” In observing *Al-Aaraaf*, Travis Montgomery writes:

While a poet may draw on literary conventions and treat any number of subjects, the imagination, for Poe, is paramount, and it must drive the creative process. Declaring allegiance to the imagination, Poe eulogizes the Orient in ‘Al Aaraaf,’ and in so doing he makes a powerful cultural statement. (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse” 19)

I agree with Montgomery: I believe that Poe put the Orient in the foreground as a major and formidable part of American literature—and he did so at a crucial point in the early development of American literature. Since it is impossible to give a complete survey of

Poe's Orientalism in so short a space, I cannot discuss the Orientalist discourse in Poe's *Eureka*. Yet this work, too, is worthy of further academic study.

## CHAPTER TWO: INTRODUCTION TO ORIENTALISM

### What is Orientalism?

The term “Orient” or “Orientalism” is ambiguous. According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, the Orient as a noun, means the countries of Asia, especially of eastern Asia (“Orient”). It is also defined as the luster characteristic of a pearl of high quality, for which the East has long been famous. In “The Concept of Orientalism,” Anwar Zanati defines Orientalism linguistically, saying that the Arabic word “Istishraq,” which means Orientalism, is formed from the meter “Istifal” (par.1). The term, Zanati observes, originally comes from “Sharq,” which means the Orient (par.1). He remarks that three letters then were added to the word “Sharq,” which are “Alaf, Seen, and taa” (par.1). From these additions, the word “Istishraq” [Orientalism] is derived, which means “the awareness and search of the Orient through observation, enquiry, and information” (par.1). In the lexicon *Al-Waseet*, one of the meanings of “Alsharq” [The Orient] is “the sun,” and the word “Almashriq” is “the direction of sun rising” (480). Thus, the noun derived from the verb “Asharqa” is “Ishraq” and means “the emission of light from the intelligible world to the mind where the knowledge is fulfilled” (480).

Like Zanati, Alshahid emphasizes that the term Orientalism is not related to the residents of the Orient or the Eastern regions. He argues that the word Orientalism in Arabic is formed by adding three letters to the word “East” or “Orient” in order to indicate a quest for knowledge. He says that the Eastern scholar or expert in the Orient cannot be called Orientalist because he already lives in the Eastern or Oriental region.

Therefore, the terms Orientalism and Orientalist “are applied exclusively to the non-Eastern and non-Oriental people who study a foreign knowledge or science which is not related to their own history and culture” (5). Alshahid concludes that the word Orient was used to search for a kind of knowledge which arose in certain region. Thus, according to the translations of the word Orient, the major meaning of the Orient is “the sun of knowledge”—and not the literal, as in the direction of the rising sun (6).

In *Alistishraq wa Alitijahat AlFikria fe Altareekh Alislami* [Orientalism and Intellectual Trends in Islamic History], Metbaqani, gives a different explanation to the meaning of the Orient. By observing studies published in German, Metbaqani says that the Orient does refer to the regions of the East (3). Zanati observes Metbaqani’s book and notes that “Morganland” (the German equivalent of “Orient”) means “the land of Morning,” shifting the meaning of the Orient from a geographical to a temporal reference—that is, to the “morning,” which includes aspects of light and wakefulness in contrast to the German word “Abendland,” which means the land of evening, a symbol for the dark and rest (Zanati par.3). In Latin usage, as Zanati points out, the term Orientalism means to learn or search for something. In French, he observes, the word for the Orient is “orienter” which means “to guide, direct, or aim” (par. 4). The word “orientate” in English, Mitbaqani remarks, means “to direct the senses towards some interest or relationship in fields of ethics, sociology, thought, and literature and to the personal interests whether intellectual or spiritual” (3). According to Abdualлах Alameen, the term Orientalism is actually not derived from any linguistic meaning but rather from the semantic/referential meaning of the sun rising, which symbolizes “knowledge, prudence, and insight” (Alameen 16). Zanati observes Altaib Bin Barāhīm’s *Alistishraq*



*Alfaransi wa taadudu Mahameh Kasa fi Aljazaer* [French Orientalism and the Multiplicity of its Duties, especially in Algeria], saying that Bin Barāhīm remarks that “the term Orientalism has a comprehensive meaning, which includes culture, history, geography, anthropology, place, time, and people which all are related and have a complimentary and organic relationship” (Zanati par.6). He also observes that the Orient is regarded by the West (America and Europe) as a focus of attention and study more than a region (par.6). He maintains that the goal of Orientalism is to study “the Orient as an identity and its history represented by Islam and Moslems in particular” (par.6).

Sigrid Hunke is one of the famous writer in German literature. She is the wife of a very famous German Orientalist, Peter H. Schulze. She had a very strong relationship with Arabs, and “she loved them, exerting efforts to defend their issues and stand by them” (Hunke 7). Her book *Allahs Sonne über dem Abendland* [Allah's sun over the Occident] caused acrimonious debate in Europe during its early publications in the sixties. Hunke observes the powerful influence of the Arabs on Europe. In her introduction, she writes, “I am very glad to see my book translated into the Arabic language in order to address the senses of Arab people. I also hope that the book will have a widespread popularity in the Arab world as a heritage of their great past and their impact on Europe and the world as a whole” (Hunke 10). By observing Hunke’s German book title, Alshahid infers that the term Orientalism should refer only to those Orientalists who specialize in Islamic studies. Since the name of Allah [God] is mentioned in the title, Alshahid thinks, it is clear that the focus of Orientalism is and ought to be positioned towards Islamic studies (1).

Edward Said (1935-2003) differs from other writers in defining Orientalism who restrict the term “Orientalist” to the Western specialists. Said actually seems to generalize that “anyone” who writes about the Orient can be called an Orientalist. He says, “Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist- either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is orientalism” (Leitch and Cain1867).

Almaleeqi defines the Orientalist in *Decoding Orientalism*, saying that “he is the teacher who is interested in studying the Arabic language and its history and exploring the civilization of the Arabs and Islam as well. He is also the college or university teacher who is immersed in knowledge and research, devoting to the continuous hard work on this field, or he is the one who is specialized in one of the disciplines related to the Orient” (62).

### **Edward Said’s *Orientalism***

The seminal book that explains broadly the term and concept is *Orientalism*, by the American-Palestinian intellectual and theorist Edward Said (1935-2003). In this book, Said focuses on Western imperialism and the ways that the West (Occident) and East (Orient), in their interrelationship, affect each other (Leitch and Cain 1861). Said argues that the West which is represented by Europe and U.S is largely prejudiced against the “non-Western people,” and regards the people from the Middle East as “oriental Others” (1861). And these prejudices can be seen in scholarship, education, culture, branches of

knowledge, and even in the view of the public (1861). Given that Said's is the seminal work in Orientalist studies, his book deserves careful consideration.

Western experts of different domains, such as "writers, archaeologists, linguists, historians, and politicians" create, design, or "discover" the Orient from the 18th century until now (Leitch and Cain 1862). The West, as Said points out, gives a false representation of the East where Orientalism reflects "fantasies" of the Orient rather than its "actual people, culture, and history" (1862). According to Said, the major point of Orientalism is the "sign" of the exercise of power of the West over the Orient and not a truthful communication about the Orient (1862). Said relates the history of Orientalism to the "subjugation" and "conquest" in the regions of the East.

The Orientalist Middle East, as Said writes, was designed and framed by the West (Leitch and Cain 1866). It was, Said explains, a "place of romance, exotic beings, and haunting memories, and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1866). Said states that although the term Orient has fallen out of use, still the concept of the Orient remains an integral part in shaping Europe (1866). It is not only that the Eastern countries are geographically close to Europe in distance, but also the fact that the Orient has enriched Europe with its "civilizations and languages" (1866). As a result of this, the Orient "has helped to define Europe [or the West]" (1866).

In the introduction of his *Orientalism*, Said focuses on the academic achievements of European writers who specialized in the study of the Orient. The disciplines in which those writers were experts are: "anthropology, philology, history, and area studies" (Leitch and Cain 1862). Said's definition of Orientalism shows the distinction between the East and West. Said defines Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an

ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’” (1867). Thus, Orientalism nourishes the idea of polarization of the East and West; this polarization, moreover, occurs in the writers of numerous fields, such as: “poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators”—all represent the Orient in their works as a different entity that distinguishes them as Europeans from the people of the Orient (1867). Like Said, Barbour, in *Before Orientalism*, observes that even if the Orient has been frequently visited and inspected by European travelers, those travelers remained distant or uninvolved in this world they visit (103). They only maintain an interest in the Orient with careful and protective observation and all their travelling is limited to “Bizarre jouissance” (103).

Said also gives the period of the late 18th century a special importance for it encountered the “Franco-British involvement in the Orient” (Leitch and Cain 1869). Said considers the involvement of France and Britain in the Orient as a multi-disciplinary intellectual (but still implicitly colonialist) project, especially in India and the Levant. The aspects that are included within this involvement are: the written works or books of the Bible and the original areas or regions of the Bible, “the spice trade,” and the military forces comprised of people from colonized areas (1868). The field of Orientalism also includes a movement of specialists, who managed colonialist activities, robust academic study or structure, numerous “experts” in the Orient and also “hands” (1868). Said adds that Orientalism includes “Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality, many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms domesticated for local European use—the list can be extended more or less indefinitely” (1868). In this period, too, the French and

British had the same interests in dealing with the Orient, which was known at that period as “India and the Biblical lands” (1868).

To demystify the term the Orient, Said tries repeatedly to define it. “The Orient,” Said writes, “is an idea that has history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West” (Leitch and Cain 1869). The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other (1869). Said focuses on the word “career” in relation to the Orient found in Disraeli’s novel *Tancred*. There, the British novelist-politician Disraeli describes the East as offering opportunities for careerism—much like the old American saying, “Go west, young man!” As Said explains, the East became a chosen pursuit or profession alluring to the “bright young westerners”: there, they would find “an all-consuming passion” (1869).

More importantly, Said notices how Orientalism misrepresents the “brute reality”: for “there were- and are cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs, have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West” (Leitch and Cain 1869). Besides the aspect of the exoticism of the East, Said regards the relationship between the East and the West as one based on “power”, “domination”, and “varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (1870).

While India, Japan, and China are parts of the Orient by definition, Orientalism places relatively greater significance of the Near East more than the Far East: indeed, “one could discuss Europe’s experience of the Near Orient, or of Islam, apart from its experience of the far Orient” (Leitch and Cain 1879). Still, the political, economic, and cultural interest of Europe in the Near East, especially in Egypt, Syria, and Arabia, is eventually extended to the regions farther West: in this regard, Persia (modern day Iran)

and India had a central importance (1879). Egypt and India were both central points of focus to Britain in 1700s and 1800s (1879).

The French Orientalism, for instance, is considered the first in Europe that researched extensively the religion of Moslems, as well as the arts of the Arabs.

“Silvestre De Sacy,” Said writes, was “the first modern and institutional European Orientalist, who worked on Islam, Arabic literature, the system of faith and worship of the Druze, and Sasanian Empire, the last empire in Persia before the dawning of Islam” (Leitch and Cain 1879). After France and Britain (which were, again, the first countries to study and explore the Orient), German scholars came to develop aspects of Orientalism in even greater detail (1879).

Said also considers the focus on Semitic languages as an aspect of Orientalism. As the 18th century progressed, there was a considerable scientific focus on researching these languages, especially in reviving ancient Hebrew language as a sacred ancestry (Leitch and Cain 1883). This revival enhanced by the development of linguistics as a science, particularly in the field known as Indo-European philology (1883). In this period, “A new powerful science for viewing the linguistic Orient was born” (1883).

One of the most prominent features of Orientalist works in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was their reliance upon each other’s research and imputed “authority,” which was strengthened by habits of quotation. For example, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* by Edward William Lane was examined and referred to by a variety of well-known writers, such as Nerval, Flaubert, and Richard Burton (Leitch and Cain 1884). Lane’s work was influential, not just on students of Egypt, but of the Near Orient generally (1884). Some passages were quoted and used by Nerval, who used exactly the

same words from Lane's book, especially the passages related to the account of a small group of dwellings in a rural area and their prospects of these place and landscape in Syria (1884).

As Said observes, the unsettled political situation in the Near Orient, especially the relationship between U.S. and some Arab governments and also the conflict between Arabs and Israel has played a central role in consolidating the field of Orientalism (Leitch and Cain 1886). "United States," Said explains, "will have lived through an era of extraordinary turbulence in the relations of East and West. No one will have failed to note how 'East' has always signified danger and threat during this period, even as it has meant the traditional Orient as well Russia" (1886). The period in which Said lived, when he received his education in Egypt, Palestine, and United States, exhibited significant tension in the relationship between the East and United States along with the unstable "Cold War" relationship between U.S. with Russia (1886).

As for the durability of the Orient discussed in Said's *Orientalism*: at the present time, the Orient is described as before, by the same qualities, particularly barbarism and despotism. "The Middle East," Said observes, "is now so identified with Great Power politics, oil economics, and the simple-minded dichotomy of freedom-loving, democratic Israel and evil, totalitarian, and terroristic Arabs, the chances of anything like a clear view of what one talks about in talking about the Near East are depressingly small" (Leitch and Cain 1887). As Said's *Orientalism* was published, the Middle East has continued to be a focus of study, given the seismic changes of the political scene, such as Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988), America-Iraq war in 1990-1991, September 11 terrorist attacks, the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the American invasion of Iraq in

2003, the Iranian nuclear program, and, more recently, the Arab Spring, the growth of extremist Islamic movements in the Arab world, the civil war in Syria, and finally the unrest in Libya, Egypt, and Yemen.

### **The History of Orientalism**

The contact between the West and East is deep rooted. As Sharafuddin observes, the antagonistic view of the West against the East is even evident as early as the 5th century BC represented by the relationship between the Greeks and the Persians (xiii). The animosity between East and West is augmented, as Said remarks, by ancient Greek literature, especially when Persia was depicted as a state ruled by tyranny, seeking to control and subjugation (Sharafuddin xiii). However, in the ancient times, too, the Orient was represented by the West ambivalently as being: “supine and vigorous, inviting and menacing, vast, mysterious, yet classifiable, describe...for western eyes” (Barbour 4). By exploring the history of Orientalism, the “durability” of the Orient in relation to the Occident and the ambivalence of the West in representing the East will be more evident.

Many important Arab writers observe the ways that the East was, for the West, an origin of knowledge. Alshahid, for example, attributes the concentration of the Europeans on the Orient to the science and knowledge that Arabs had imparted to Greek civilization (7). Greece is not located in the Orient, but the origin of their scientific progress is attributed to the East or what is called now “The Arab and Islamic world” (7). The most important figures, Alshahid points out, that learned and conveyed the disciplines to Greece from the Egyptian civilization are Plato and Pythagoras (7). After returning from Egypt specifically the city Ain Shams, Plato inaugurated his academy and wrote in its



entrance doorway that “no one enters this school except those who have knowledge in engineering” (7). Platonic thought was then developed by the Jewish philosopher Philo or as he was called Philo Alexandria who lived in Alexandria in Egypt when it was a part of the Roman Empire (7). Neoplatonism, a philosophy founded by Plotinus who died in 270 A.D, reemerged as a subject during the 19th century (Gerson par. 1). Plotinus was from Egypt and his philosophy Egyptian, though it also spread over a large area at that time (Alshahid 7). The three main world religions (besides paganism) were influenced by his metaphysics (Gerson sec. 5).

The most famous Church Father of early Christianity was Saint Augustine. Augustine was born in 354 A.D. in the city of Thagaste or what is known now Souk Ahras in Algeria in Roman Africa (MacKendrick 326), all of this helps to establish the claim, as Alshaid observes, that the Orient is the origin of knowledge and science and also the cradle of the divine monotheistic religions Christianity, Islam, and Judaism; it is to Central Asia that one looks for the origins of such non-monotheistic religions as Zoroastrianism (dualism), Buddhism, Hinduism, and other lesser-known religions (7). Because of this, Alshahid focuses on the religious importance of Orientalism.

During the Crusades, the Middle East was increasingly seen as a region of savageness and barbarism. The wars of the Crusades in the Middle Ages had economical and colonial intentions. These wars negatively affected life in Europe and spread feelings of antagonism towards the ideas of Arabs and their religious beliefs (Almaleeqi 15-16). Some historians suggest that the beginning of Orientalism started in the early 13th century when the European monks entered Al-Andalus and attempted to translate several Arabic and Islamic books into Latin, such as the Qur'an and hadiths of Mohammad (16).

And Almaleeqi gives another important reason behind this first version of Orientalism, which is that the Arab and Islamic world of the 12<sup>th</sup> century was prosperous, in comparison to its European neighbors. This movement paid close attention to the Hebrew books which included religious explanations and interpretations.

The early figures who had contact with the Orient or studied some field related to the Orient were monks, translators, philosophers and even rulers. The French monk Gerbert of Aurillac (ca. 955-1003), for instance, became one of the most famous scholars in Europe, especially in Arabic mathematics and astronomy (Alzaqzooq 20). Pope Sylvester II or Silvester II (c. 946 – 12 May 1003) was also educated in Islamic studies when he lived in Qurtaba Al-Andalus (Almaleeqi 115). Additionally, Gerard of Cremona (1114–1187), an Italian translator, studied Arabic and the Arabic sciences as well (115). He translated about eighty Arabic books into Latin, especially the books that are associated with logic, mathematics, geometry, medicine, astrology, and optics (115).

The figure that should be most admired, as Almaleeqi thinks, is Frederick II., the King of Sicily (116). He, as Almaleeqi observes, had a broad culture, encouraging arts and sciences (116). He studied Arabic and was engaged in Arabic philosophy which was taught in his palace (116). He dedicated a lot of translated Arabic books to the universities of Polonius and Paris (116). He also established the University of Naples in 1224 and it was a famous academy that conveyed the Arabic disciplines to the Western countries (116). Because of the good relationship with Islam, the King was dismissed by Pope Gregory IX from Sicily in 1239 (116). Further, Roger Bacon (1214-1292), who was an English philosopher and Franciscan friar, realized that the secret of the power of the Islamic civilization lay in its fusion of knowledge both worldly and divine (116). He

knew that the only way to explain the failure of the Crusades was to explore the knowledge and pursue the sciences of the Islamic world, especially the Levant and Al-Andalusia or Moorish Spain (117). He was also acquainted with the conceptions of the Islamic philosopher Bin Rushd (1126- 1198) who wrote on “the origin of the religions, the belief in the oneness of God, and fate and destiny” (117). These conceptions of Bin Rushd were actually very common in Europe, and believed by some to refute the philosophy of Aristotle and his fellows (117).

During the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries the Orient was for the West, specifically for England a mixture of power of attraction and at the same time a source of danger. When the English Company the Levant or Turkey Company was founded in 1581, its goal was to improve the economic relations with the Near East, especially Turkey and the Eastern part of the Mediterranean. These relations were based on deferential regard and esteem toward the Islamic world and the cooperation in investment and business (Barbour 5). At the same time, though, English Renaissance literature reduced Islam to a religion hostile to Christianity: “Yet early orientalist discourse, by framing Islam as the demonic antagonist to a potentially united Christendom, often performs precisely that reduction” (5). If a Christian wanted to change his/her religion or specifically convert to the Islamic religion, he/she would definitely have met with mockery and derision and also would have paid a penalty as retribution for an act of sacrilege (5). Nonetheless, there was a continuous association and relationship between England and the Islamic world for mutual benefit. England-Arab relations were beneficial to Queen Elizabeth, who faced Catholic Spain and other Roman Catholic opponents in Europe. Barbour observes that a strong relationship with the East was enormously useful to England (as a

rich source of trading) and, rather than showing antagonism, the Queen and her agents “aimed to exploit triangulations of wealth and power within a comprehensive Mediterranean world rather than to enforce an ontological division between ‘East’ and ‘West’” (5).

Nevertheless, the theater in England showed hostility to the Turks who were represented as an evil power to the Christian society (Barbour 5). The East was occasionally represented in the arts during the Renaissance. The play *Tamburlaine*, for example, presents the life of the Islamic Mughal emperor Tamerlane the Great and was written by the English playwright, Christopher Marlow (1564-1593). Marlow’s play represented the East as a military power and at the same time showed the strong desire and long-term goal for heroism of England (8). The play later inspired Edgar Allan Poe to write his poem *Tamerlane*.

Another representation of the Orient in the arts in England was about the most famous incident of the killing of brothers in the history of the Ottoman Empire. By observing Knolles’s *The General Historie of the Turks*, Barbour remarks that nineteen brothers were “strangled” when Mehmed III (r. 1595-1603) came to the throne (Barbour 23). The system made by the Ottoman Empire in the royal family, as Philip Mansel argues, underwent subsequent violent incidents among the brothers, especially among those who succeeded to a hereditary royal rank (81-2, 86). The ferocious “infratricide” and the imposition of severe punishments that were inflicted on other members of the royal family in the Ottoman Empire might have inspired bloody scenes in the Tudor dynasty of which the most famous violent occurrence were the executions of Lady Jane Grey and Mary Stuart, whose heads were cut off (Barbour 23). The events in which large

numbers of the members of the royal house in England were killed were persistently depicted by Shakespeare. For example, the brutal and inhumane killing of his relative Richard II obsessed Henry IV (23). As claimed by the monarchy, Henry V reassures his brothers that they will remain alive because they will not face the bloody fate of brothers of the royal Turkish family: “This is the English, not the Turkish court/ No Amurath succeeds, /But Harry Harry” (Henry IV 5.2.47-9). The disturbing feelings of the imminent danger of being put to death frightens Henry’s brothers and Lord Chief justice. Knolles’s *The General Historie of the Turks* was published in 1603 and kept its popularity from the 17th century into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Attar 4). It was read, Attar remarks, by Lord Byron and it had an influence on his poetry as he himself said (4). Barbour observes Knolles’s book, explaining that the extreme brutality common among the Turks caused trouble and resentment to Europe “because they hit close to home” (23).

In the early times of Orientalism, the main problem, as Barbour remarks, that deepened the division between the West and the East is the military existence of the Turkish Empire (17). For instance, the Turks seized Constantinople in 1453. After fierce battles, they were unsuccessful in controlling Vienna in 1529, but they successfully surrounded Malta with huge armed forces in 1565 and took Cyprus in 1571 (17). The frequent attacking and piracy of the English ships was also a source of worry and danger to Europe (England included) at that period (17).

The achievement that the Islamic world succeeded to make in unity and peace in their regions caused resentment to Europe which lived in almost continual and dynastic civil war (Barbour 24). In the *Complaint of Peace* (1517), Erasmus criticizes the Christians sharply: “Christians have a treaty with the Turks and are at war amongst

themselves” (Erasmus 304-305). Similarly, Barbour observes that Knolles refers to the word “islami,” saying it means ““men of one mind, or at peace among themselves” (“indvction,” third page), and he decries Christian division” (Knolles 153-154). Barbour infers that conquering the Levant was an urgent need for Europe, and that an alliance among Christians would be established for this purpose (24). As a result, there were determined attempts to unite Europe against a common Moslem “enemy.”

During the Romantic era, the Near Orient was increasingly a major center of interest and study. The French poet and novelist Victor Hugo (1802-85) says, in his collection of poems *Les Orientales*, that “Oriental studies have never been so advanced, in the age of Louis XIV, one was a Hellenist; now one is an Orientalist” (qtd. in Attar 7). Because of the contributions of the Romantic writers and Europeans in general, “the Orient was Orientalized” by “an average nineteenth-century European” (Said 5). Other writers less famous and almost forgotten also wrote on Orientalist themes. But, as Sharafuddin observes, some of these writers “are in fact better than they are thought to be, [and] if we have failed to see it is because we have failed to take their content—their orientalism—seriously enough” (xx).

Though the Orient in this period was represented as a region ruled by the despotism and tyranny of the Ottoman Empire, it was appreciated in many ways. When he came back from the East, Byron wrote to Francis Hodgson on 3 September 1811: “I will bring you ten Mussulmans [who] shall shame you in all goodwill towards men, prayer to God, and duty to their neighbors” (Eisler 298). This warm admiration from Byron towards the Moslem people made him, as Edmund Burke, free from the prejudiced belief in the superiority of a specific race over others and also from the narrow-

mindedness of their colleagues (Sharafuddin xxiv). Like Byron and Burke, Lady Mary Wortley Montague (1689-1762) was also a prominent traveler in the East. She spent two years in Turkey from 1716 to 1718, being wife of the English ambassador in Turkey. She shared the daily life of the Turkish women of the royal family (xxv). During her residence there, she documented her observation of Turkish life in her letters, which were published in 1763 (xxv). These letters increased attention on Orientalism during the 18th century and awaked interest in the exploration of other cultures rather than being restricted to English culture (xxv). Her letters, Sharafuddin states, reflect “acuteness” and “vivacity” in observing life in Turkey (xxv).

James Bruce (1730-91) was another prominent traveler to the East. His book *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790-91) enriched the imagination of the Romantic poets (Sharafuddin xxv). The introduction is devoted to nomadic life in the Arab lands, which resembled Rousseau’s theory of the “man of nature” (xxv). The region’s natural scenery and the climate, as Sharafuddin explains, are elaborated upon in Bruce’s book. One of the best examples is the strong, hot, sand-laden wind of the Sahara and Arabian deserts known as “simoom,” which influenced the Romantic poets and was reflected on their literary works (xxvi).

The long-term prevalent weather conditions of the areas of the Arabian peninsula, especially the dry, often sandy region of little rainfall, extreme temperatures, and sparse vegetation were presented in clear and striking manner in the journeys of Carsten Niebuhr (1757-1820). In *Travels through Arabia*, Niebuhr commended the Arab people, who adopted the nomadic life, for being independent and pure (Sharafuddin xxvi). Niebuhr is known for his precise scrutiny of the optical phenomenon ‘mirage’ which in

Arabic language is 'sarab.' His close inspection of this phenomenon influenced the figurative language and visual symbolism of the Romantic writers (xvi).

One of the most significant figure in the Romantic era, who pressed for new expressive and evocative images in literature, is Sir William Johns (1746-1794). He is known for his translation of the best poems of the pre-Islamic period known as Mu'allaqat (or the seven poems) in 1877. In his essay 'Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations', he regards the Orient as a desirable and worthy place and a fecund world of ideas that can provide the European and American poem with beauty and power (Sharafuddin xxvi). He urges European poets to turn their interest to the East for creating a new trend of figures of speech rather than adhering to the same worn devices and the same stories and legends: "we should be furnished with a new set of metaphors and similitudes; and a number of which future scholars might explain and future poets might imitate" (xxvii). Sir William Johns also appreciated some characteristics he saw in the Arab people, such as the love of poetry and rhetoric: "The only arts, in which they [*Hejazi* Arabs] pretended to excellence, (I except horsemanship and military accomplishments) were poetry and rhetoric: that we have none of their compositions in prose before the Koran, may be ascribed, perhaps, to the little skill" (Jones and Shipley 48).

In addition to the interest in Arab poetry, the West at this time was acquainted with the Qur'an, because it had been translated into Latin by several priests interested in the controversial relationship between Islam and Christianity; their interests led them to questions concerning religious truth and the nature of God (Sharafuddin xxviii). For instance, Alexander Ross (1590-1654) translated the Qur'an from the French language,



using the translation of Andre du Ryer (xxviii). However, the most famous translation of the Qur'an in the Romantic period was the one made by George Sale (c. 1697-1736) in 1734. Sale's translation of the Qur'an influenced many Western writers, especially the Romantic poets (Sharafuddin xxviii-xxix). Instead of relying on Western scholars to discuss the critical controversial matters, Sale wanted to rely on Islamic scholars who were specialists in the critical explanation and analysis of the religious texts (xxix). As Sharafuddin points out, the major goal behind Sale's translation was to show the "absurdity" and "imposture" of this book (xxix). Yet, it is ironic to notice how the Qur'an caused an enormous influence on the most famous Romantic writers, such as Byron and Moore (xxix), who also happen to be among the most influential British poets on the American poet Edgar Allan Poe. Byron admired the Qur'an because of its powerful and effective language, the profundity of its themes, and its ability to evoke feelings (Sharafuddin xxix). Though many verses of the Qur'an reproach those who see the Qur'an as poetry, Byron recognized the value of the "poetic sublimity" that the Qur'an reflected to him (xxix). Like Byron, the poets Landor, Southey, and Moore were impressed and powerfully influenced by the Qur'an, especially its teachings about goodness and correct conduct in human beings and about "the profound viability of a civilization" they saw in it (xxix). George Sale's translation of the Qur'an and also Constantin François de Chassebœuf, comte de Volney's Orientalist works *Turks and Arabs* and *Travels through Syria and Egypt* "translated barbarous splendor into usable information for the sublimely talented poet" (Said 168).

*The Arabian Nights* is the second book after the Qur'an that influenced most of the Romantic poets. The theme of exoticism in *The Arabian Nights* is one of the

prominent elements that appealed to the Romantic imagination (Sharafuddin xxx). The Arabian tales, Sharafuddin remarks, showed a special and inventive way to narrate the events of stories (xxx), which had the power to attract and please people of different cultures (xxx). The translation of Antoine Galland of *The Arabian Nights* was a successful achievement in Europe at the beginning of the 1700s (xxx). Galland's translation also contributed to increasing the attention of Western writers to the Eastern artistic compositions. *Turkish Tales*, written by Petis de la Croix in 1707, is an example of "the rapid growth in the 'oriental tale'" (xxx). The Eastern literary works, poetry or tales certainly enriched the thinking of the Western readers and writers, and they added new insight and awareness brought by exploring different cultures (xxx).

In *Borrowed Imagination: The British Romantic Poets and Their Arabic-Islamic Sources*, Attar observes that *The Arabian Nights* had a powerful influence on the Romantic poets and the poets who lived in the period before Romanticism as well. Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, and Edgar Allan Poe, Attar remarks, were avid readers of the Arabian tales (4). The Romantic poets, Attar observes, were influenced by many aspects of these tales, the most distinctive being the themes of "free will" and "predestination" (4). Unfortunately, the influence of these tales on the Romantic poets has not sufficiently observed. Attar emphasizes that there was a deliberate inattention to the influence of Eastern sources on European literature during the 18th and 19th centuries, even though these sources were accessible abundantly (17). The Eastern books, Attar states, were regarded as inferior, having less importance and value, so that these books did not gain the fair appreciation and focus they should have had (17).

Along with the promulgation of the ideas of Islam, which was wide in Europe, Attar says that there were numerous Eastern books that were available to the Romantic poets in England. Thus, Attar argues that the Romantic poets, especially Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron were influenced by the pre-Islamic poetry (14). Attar also explains that the arts of Andalusia and Persia obviously influenced Shelly and Byron: “Love and mystic poetry from Persian to Andalusia might have opened the eyes of the young English poets to new passion” (14). Hence, one of the most famous Eastern poets who influenced the European writers was the Sufi Persian poet Hafez (1390). The German poet and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) wrote a collection of poetry, inspired by the poetry of Hafez (7). More significantly, the Arabic philosophical novel *Hay Ibn Yaqzan*, written by Ibn Tufayl and published in 1160 or 1170, influenced Europe massively. The novel was first translated into Hebrew in 1349 and then was translated into Latin by Pico della Mirandola, who was a famous Italian philosopher and one of the major writers of the Renaissance. The central importance that Ibn Tufayl’s novel obtained caused it to be translated into many European languages: English, Dutch, German, and others (8). For instance, the British Orientalist Simon Ockley (1678-1720) translated *Hay Ibn Yaqzan* into English in 1708, and he was also well-known for his book *History of the Saracens*, which was published at the beginning of the 1700s. The major concepts of the novel, Attar observes, were crucial, and they contributed to stimulate and inspire the French Revolution (10). Other primary themes and notions of the novel also found their way into the poetry of the Romantic poets, such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelly (10).

With my survey complete of the term Orientalism, its usage in history and literature, and its presence in contemporary criticism, I turn now to an Orientalist reading of selected works of Edgar Allan Poe.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE ORIENTALISM OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

### Historical Background

The period in which Poe lived was fully aware of the Near Orient and, in particular, the Islamic Orient. The early presidents of the United States clearly expressed their concerns about Islam, regarding it as anti-Christian religion. John Quincy Adams (1767-1848), who was president from 1825 to 1829 and contemporary to Poe, is well-known for his blunt statements on Islam. Adams's view of Islam is that it is a religion of falsehood. He also sided with the Balkan countries supported by the Russian Empire when they were in wars against the Ottoman Empire (Miller par.3). These wars were called Russo-Turkish wars. The first one lasted from 1768-1774 and the second from 1787 to 1792 lasted almost twelve years. Adams wrote several essays about this war, and one year after he was a president in 1830 (par.3), he described the Islamic world and the Prophet Mohammad as a destructive power on the world:

In the seventh century of the Christian era, a wandering Arab of the lineage of Hagar, the Egyptian, combining the powers of transcendent genius, with the preternatural energy of a fanatic, and the fraudulent spirit of an impostor, proclaimed himself as a messenger from Heaven, and spread desolation and delusion over an extensive portion of the earth. (Blunt 269)

Such statements were definitely familiar to Edgar Allan Poe, as a coeval with Adams, and this fact reveals the significance of the Near Orient to Poe, especially the Turkish Empire.

More importantly, the other wars that increased Poe's awareness of the Near Orient are the Barbary wars between the young American nation and most of the states of North Africa ruled by the Ottoman Empire. In "The Near East," Montgomery points out

that the “cultural stereotypes” about the Moslem world “figured prominently in American accounts of the Barbary Wars. During the early national period, diplomatic relations between America and the Barbary States — Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli — were poor” (58-59). The main reason for this war was the attempt of piracy against American ships, which were sailing the Mediterranean (Barbary Wars par.1). The first war between the two sides raged for nearly four years from 1801 to 1805. This war was mainly against Tripoli (par.1). The second Barbary war started in 1815 and ended in 1816. During the periods of these two wars, U.S. military ships launched multiple attacks near the coasts of the Barbary States to emancipate hostages taken by the pirates. There were also several attempts to exchange the American captives for tributes and ransoms that the U.S. governments would have been responsible to pay to the Barbary pirates to release the American captives (par.1). The direct clash with the pirates in North Africa was actually a major issue in the foreign policy of the American government. Poe clearly knew of the Barbary wars and the literary works related to them, which all were almost contemporary with him. Montgomery points out that “when the last of these [wars] ended in 1816, Edgar Allan Poe was seven years old” (“The Near East” 59). Montgomery also observes that while the Barbary wars have no direct references in Poe’s literary writings, “he used American representations of the Middle East that emerged from these conflicts for creative purposes” (59). Observing some of the writings, which referred to the Barbary wars, Schueller points out that “U.S. - North African conflict of the late eighteenth century is evident in such works as Royall Tyler’s *The Algerian Captive* and Susanna Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers*” (ix). Tyler’s novel was published in 1797 and

Rowson's play in 1794. These two works were almost contemporary to Poe and indicate the influence of the Barbary wars on the American narratives.

The issue of the Islamic religion and doctrines was an important, sensitive, and controversial topic discussed at Poe's time. There was, Marr explains, a large representation of the Islamic world in America and this representation was an image seen in the minds of the Americans rather than actual representation of this world. This representation, as Marr points out, "reveal[ed] more about the constitution of American imaginations than it [did] about the character of Muslim beliefs" (8-7). The matters which were related to the beliefs of the religion of Islam and Moslems are put in the term, Marr created, "American Islamicism" which differs from the phrase "oriental codes" which all of these matters related to Islam (8-7). Hence, the Near Orient, as Marr remarks, was controversial to the Americans in the political, cultural, and social aspects and was "prevailing form during Poe's early years" (10).

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, most of the American travelers to the Holy Land had the idea in mind that the Holy Land should be pure, that is free from Moslem domination. "Exporting Christian purity back to the Holy Land," Marr observes, "was a crucial divine duty they believed would culminate in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth" (83). Marr clearly shows that the American travelers to the Holy land categorically rejected the Ottoman grasp on the Levant. The fall of the Ottoman empire, as he writes, was a necessity that should be fulfilled to reestablish the original home of the Jews in this land as a prior condition: "Indeed, the central reason for the interest of many early Americans in the fate of the Ottoman Empire was that its removal and

destruction stood as an essential prerequisite to the restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem, signaling that the second advent of Christ was imminent” (83).

Levi Parson (1792-1822) is considered one of the early American travelers who officially caused travel to the Holy Land to begin. He openly declared before he started his voyage that to “destroy the Ottoman Empire and nothing but a miracle will prevent the Jews’ immediate return from the four winds of heaven” (Barton 86). The absolute control of the Moslem rule on the Holy land, Parsons believed and the other Americans did with the zeal of the Christian faith, was a confusing and difficult problem, yet a demanding task to abolish (Marr 83). They often related the end of Ottoman domination with the prophetic verses of the Bible and concluded that it sooner or later would vanish (83). Parson writes, “I desire to know it be revealed, the divine purpose in regard to this great empire of sin,” ... “how long it will remain? By what means will it be subdued?” (Parson 256).

The Qur’an, the book of the Islamic religion, also has roots at the beginnings of the emergence of America. In “The Early American Quran: Islamic Scripture and US Canon,” Einboden writes that the influence of the Qur’an is strongly evident in the writings of the founders of American literature. He shows that the Qur’an was one of the early nuclei in Poe’s poetry. He observes that the result of Poe’s inspiration of the Qur’an was a genuinely creative oeuvre, the first one being *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (7).

Thus, the Qur’an and interpreting its verses provided a great abundance of ideas, concepts, and images in American early writings, specifically Poe’s “with his verses becoming vessels not only for Qur’anic texts, but also for the Qur’anic paratexts, of Sale’s English translation” (Einboden 9). The influence on Poe of the Qur’an, as



Einboden points out, is because of “its enduring claims of authority” and its “exotic otherness” (9). Everything about Poe is at odd with familiarity so that “in Hell below, readers encounter ‘Eblis’; in Heaven above, they find ‘Israfel’; and in-between, they experience the limbo of ‘Al Aaraaf’” (9). The American readership of the sacred writings of the Islamic religion found newness and vivacity in these writings. “The Muslim scripture,” Einboden says, “holds for Poe a fresh and vivid legitimacy in its detailing the wonders of the next world. A sibling scripture to the Bible, the Quran yet remains both alien and irreducible for American audiences in the nineteenth century, embodying a mysterious foreignness” (9). Not only is the Qur’anic influence evident in his narrative and poetic writings, Einboden remarks, but also Poe “invokes the Quran within his 1844 ‘*Marginalia*’” (9).

In reading and appreciating the works of the Italian poet Camoes, Poe was filled with astonishment at the accuracy of these works, comparing them to the Qur’an. He quoted the Qur’anic phrase which is the second verse of chapter “the Cow”: “dhalika’ l-Kitabu la rayba fihi [there is no error in this book]” (Einboden 2). Poe’s assessment of Camoes’s book as precise and accurate, using the Qur’anic phrase is found in his *Marginalia* to show “the lack of errata found in the book” (9). “Here is an edition,” Poe writes, “which so far as microscopical excellence and absolute accuracy of typography are concerned, might well be prefaced with the phrase of the Koran- ‘there is no error in this book’” (Griswold 364). Therefore, the Qur’an was not only a book to be read for its imaginative values, but also for the philosophical and theoretical importance that inspired the American writers of 19th century who saw the Qur’an as “a quotable commonplace”

(Einboden 10). Despite the concern that the Islamic Orient caused to America, this did not prevent the exploration of the Qur'an by the early American writers.

The Qur'an in America was actually first introduced by three major American writers: Poe, Irving, and Emerson. They are considered the early American writers and the pioneers who first shed light on and deeply discussed the Qur'an in their literary works and also their essays. "Early American fascination with the Quran's textuality and aesthetics," Einboden points out, "exhibited first by Irving in 1826 Andalusia, and Poe in 1829 Boston – invites our return to Emerson, who, after purchasing the Quran in 1833 London, departs again for American shores in September of this year" (10).

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Europe helped to introduce the Near Orient to America. Through these European efforts, the Orient became a source of activity, influence, and knowledge: "From being a place, the Orient became a domain of actual scholarly rule and potential imperial sway" (Said 197). Poe makes it clear in his literary works that he was influenced by such British romanticists as Byron, Coleridge, and Moore. All of these writers presented the Orient vigorously in their literary works. So, it is easy to understand how the Orient was communicated to America by the efforts of the writers of different European countries who were immersed in studying the Orient, especially the Near East. Obediate presents the role that Europe played in defining and presenting the Orient to America, especially the writers of the Romantic Movement: "European writers, the British romanticists in particular, played a tremendous role in the formation of the American reception of Muslim thought and character. Indeed, much of the history of the American awareness of Oriental themes and ideas may be explained as an integral part of the European discovery of the East" (25). Not only had the Romantic

Movement been influenced by the Orient, but also American Transcendentalism paid great attention to the major concepts of the religion of Islam. The transcendentalist movement was contemporary to Edgar Allan Poe. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), the founder of the transcendentalist movement and Poe, the dark romanticist, knew each other but opposed each other's concepts simultaneously. Although transcendentalism opposed Romanticism, Islam was strongly present in its writings. Emerson's writings reflect a transparent mark of his influence by the Islamic thoughts and the Qur'an.

Obeidat explains that Emerson was extensively influenced by the Orient. He says that Emerson showed attraction and sympathy to the thoughts and concepts of Islam and he felt that they harmonized with his own (28). The poetry of the Near Orient, especially the Persian Sufi poets had a strong impact on Emerson. Emerson, as Obediate points out, "showed genuine admiration for the Sufi poets (especially Hafiz and Saadi), referring to and quoting them extensively both in his prose and poetry" (28). Emerson started his two famous essays with quotations from the Prophet Mohammad and the Qur'an. In his essay "Love," he is inspired by the words from the Qur'an "I was as a gem concealed; Me my burning ray revealed" (167) and in "Heroism" he quotes from the Prophet Mohammad "Paradise is under the shadow of swords" (243).

As for Poe, the Orient in his poetry and short stories is intensely evident. Yothers, shows that Poe referred extensively to the Near East in his short stories or poems in almost every literary work, using figures from the Qur'an and references to Oriental locations. "The Near East," Yothers explains, "manifests itself everywhere in Poe's work, because he compulsively wrote Gothic stories with heroines whose eyes are like those of houris, poems about Qur'anic angels, and parodies that use ancient Egypt, Syria,

Arabia, and Jerusalem as settings” (“Desert of the Blest”: Poe's Anti-Representational Invocations of the Near East” 2). In *U.S. Orientalisms*, Schueller says that the Orient or the Middle East in the literary works of Poe, Spofford, and Melville “resists being othered and causes epistemological crisis for the adventuring hero from the new world” (109). The two major aspects, Schueller points out, that nourished American Orientalism in 1800s are “Egyptology” and “missionary fervor” (ix). Hence, the Middle East, Schueller explains, has a strong presence in Poe’s short stories, particularly those that are influenced by ancient Egypt and its civilization. “Like many of his contemporaries,” Schueller writes, “he [Poe] was fascinated with the discoveries of Jean-Francois Champollion and with Alexander Von Humboldt, the geographer and explorer greatly interested in hieroglyphics, to whom Poe dedicated Eureka” (110). Goldhurst also explains that Poe was profoundly influenced by the Middle East: “He also, though few remember it, drew deeply on the culture of the Middle East: history, religion, personages, legends and ideas” (par.2). Poe’s heavy symbolic representation of the Middle East proved his deep and extensive learning and knowledge about this region. At the same time, he shows deferential regard and admiration toward the translated sources of literary, religious, and cultural aspects of the Middle East. Poe, as Goldhurst explains, saw Egyptian civilization as a typical example of Eastern civilizations and it could not be compared to America. This appreciation of the Egyptian civilization is notable in his story *Some Words with a Mummy* (par.3).

The main short stories that exhibit Poe’s influence by the Middle East are *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scherazade*, *Ligiea*, and *Shadow*. The story *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scherazade* reflects Poe’s interest in *The Arabian Nights*. In addition

to the influence and appreciation of these creative tales, Poe also shows a humorous and satirical imitation of the tales which indicates his awareness of “the historical nightmare of colonization” (Schueller 110). The short story *Ligeia* refers to the Middle East as in the reference to the beautiful virgins of Moslem paradise known as “houris”: “the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk” (Mabbott 313). Poe also refers to the angel of death in the Islamic tradition called “Azrael”: “I saw that she must die — and I struggled desperately in spirit with the grim Azrael” (316). Schueller observes that *Ligeia* is a metaphorical use made to refer to the investigation of the Orient as a “defining feature of USAmerican nationhood in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century” (113). As a symbol of ancient civilizations and the Near Orient, *Ligeia*, as Schueller points out, is seen as a “challenge to the centrality of Western civilization” and she is “well learned” and “is proficient in many classical languages and deeply immersed in metaphysical studies” (114). Like Schueller, Hoffman emphasizes *Ligeia*’s superiority and transcendence, saying that “But if we examine ‘*Ligeia*’ in the light of western interest in Egyptology, we see that *Ligeia*’s oriental looks and unsurpassable knowledge go hand in hand” (90).

Like Goldhurst, Yothers in “Desert of the Blest: Poe’s Anti-Representational Invocations of the Near East,” observes that the Near East has an obvious and formidable presence in Poe’s short stories and poems. Yothers observes that Poe repeatedly invokes the Near East in some of his important poems and short stories as an evocative part of the world, such as “allusions in poems such as ‘*Al-Aaraaf*’ and ‘*Israfel*’, Gothic tales such as ‘*Silence– Second Tale of Scheerazad*’,...imaginary and poetic landscape which is indebted for its effects to a specific region of globe to which Poe insistently refers, and

which he consistently refuses to describe in any but the most tantalizingly inexact terms” (54). Oriental images whether cultural, civilizational, religious, or literary are an irresistible attraction for Poe, which made him metaphorically wander and roam far away from his native land and escape the literary traditions of American national writings.

Scientifically speaking, in “The missing link between the Quran and the Modern Physics”, Poe is discussed as the first writer to evoke the Big Bang Theory in 1848 in his essay *Eureka*, drawing much inspiration from the Qur’an (The Invitation par.2). Although the Russian mathematician Alexander Friedmann (1886-1925) and the American astronomer Edwin Hubble (1889-1953) contributed enormously to working on and developing this scientific theory, Poe is considered the first one to propose it and was “inspired by the Qur’an in his life-long quest for an alternative for the scientific opinions of his days” (The Invitation par.2). The crux of this theory in Poe’s cosmogonic essay is that the origin of the universe was an “undivided and unified particle,” and then this particle was shattered violently by an excessive internal pressure by the power of God: “By an act of God, this particle exploded into an expanding, finely divided nebulae, from which the entire universe slowly evolved due to the actions of the forces of nature that were created with it, especially the force of gravity” (The Invitation par.11). In “The Invitation,” Poe pointedly draws on the Qur’anic verse found in chapters called Al-Anbiya, which discusses the theory of the joining of heaven and earth and their division as well: “Are the disbelievers not aware that the heavens and the earth used to be joined together and that We ripped them apart?” (Sale 30-31). Poe’s inspiration in the Qur’an made later Friedmann to be influenced by Poe’s theory of the origin of the universe and then led him to postulate that “the universe could not be static, but must be dynamic

(either expanding or contracting)” (The Invitation par.19). After illustrating the points of influence of the Qur’an in *Eureka*, “The Invitation” persistently sheds light on exploring the Oriental discourse in Poe’s *Eureka*, especially the influence by the Qur’an to discuss further more scientific facts evoked by Poe: “whilst the oriental inspirations of Poe are still little known, so a serious study and comparison of the Qur’an and ‘Eureka’ still has to be started” (par.14). In addition to Poe’s essay or prose poem *Eureka*, which in many ways is influenced by the Near Orient, specifically the Qur’an, Poe’s other two essays that extensively discuss the Middle Eastern region are “Review of Stephen’s Arabia Petrae” and “Palastine.”

Having illustrated the influence of the Near Orient on Poe’s poems, short stories, and prose essays, I will focus next on Poe’s two essays: “Review of Stephen’s Arabia Patrae” and “Palastine” and the early collection of Poe’s *Poems: Second Edition* (1831). The major poems in this collection which refer strongly to the Near Orient are: *Israfel*, *To Helen*, *The Doomed City*, and *Al-Aaraaf*.

### **Poe’s “Review of Stephen’s Arabia Petraea”**

In this essay, Poe briefly and accurately examines the book *Travels in Egypt, Arabia Petræa, and the Holy Land* written by the American traveler Stephen Olin (1797-1851), which was published in 1844. Poe mainly focused in his essay on Stephen’s experience and description of the Arab world, specifically Levant (The Holy Land), the Arab peninsula, and Egypt. Poe’s essay was reprinted in 1856 in the collection *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe (1850-1856)* which contained four volumes. Like Stephen, American and European travelers showed a burning desire to visit the Middle East,

especially the Holy Land. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said explains that the period of the late 19th century was known as the period of pilgrimage to the Holy Land: “all pilgrimages to the Orient passed through, or had to pass through, the Biblical lands; most of them in fact were attempts either to relive or to liberate from the large, incredibly fecund Orient some portion of Judeo-Christian/ Greco-Roman actuality” (Said 168). The Orient for these travelers was seen as a challenge that they should take as others did, such as, “the Bible, the Crusades, Islam, Napoleon, and Alexander” (168).

The most famous writers, who were contemporary to Poe, presented the Middle East as a place with no confinement and restriction. In Lord Byron’s ‘Giaour,’ Goethe’s lyrical poems *Westostlicher Diwan* and Victor Hugo’s *Orinetales*, the Near East was depicted as “a form of release, a place of original opportunity” (Said 167). In Goethe’s *Hegire*, the East is the land of freedom, void of spiritual and moral defilement, and it is the place of innocence: “fly away, and in the pure East/ Taste the Patriarch’s air” (qtd. in Said 167). In *Orientalism*, Said also mentions the French poet François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) and Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) to whom Poe also referred at the end of his essay (Griswold 388). The main reason behind their travels to the Middle East, as Said points out, is to make pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Lamartine, for example, saw the Arab region as a place of extraordinarily inspiring wonders and the land of religions and prophets: “The Arab land is the land of prodigies; everything sprouts there, and every credulous or fanatical man can become a prophet in his turn” (de Lamartine 311). Commenting on de Lamartine, Said states that de Lamartine “has internalized reality enough to want to retreat from it back into pure contemplation, solitude, philosophy, and poetry” (178). Because it is the region of the Holy Land and the



ancient civilizations, the Middle East is given a divine and historical significance by many Orientalist writers, which is also evident in Stephen's *Travels in Egypt, Arabia Petrae, and the Holy Land* and Poe's essay, which reexamines Stephen's book.

Poe discusses the strong tendency towards exploring the Bible and he may attribute that to the traveling that aimed at studying the original regions of the Bible. In the essay, Poe shows how the study of the Bible was widespread during his time. Poe also refers to an abundance of sources brought from the East, especially the ones that concentrated on interpreting the Bible: "Of late days, the immense stores of biblical elucidation derivable from the East have been rapidly accumulating in the hands of the student" (Griswold 372).

Scottish surgeon Patrick Russell (1726-1805) who is the author of *Natural History of Aleppo* is an example of those who were interested in the Orient mentioned by Poe. Russell's book discusses the description of the city of Aleppo in Syria, its people, its conditions of weather, and also the virulent infectious diseases that it had. Being greatly impressed by the fecundity of the Eastern books, Poe says, "We have now a vast accession to our knowledge of Oriental regions" (Griswold 372). Poe then makes it more clear that one of the major goals of traveling to the East was the strong religious belief of those travelers: "Intelligent and observing men, impelled by the various motives of Christian zeal, military adventure, the love of gain, and the love of science, have made their way, often at imminent risk, into every land rendered holy by the words of revelation" (372). It is also clear that the objectives of traveling to the East were mainly for imperialist interests, but also stemmed from strong desire to study the original lands of the Bible for scholarly purposes (372). The valuable experience and study of the

Orient, as Poe remarks, made the regions from which the Bible originated easily recognized and studied: “Through the medium of the pencil, as well as of the pen, we are even familiarly acquainted with the territories of the Bible” (372). Poe also refers to the fecundity of the Eastern sources that were mentioned earlier in chapter one and how the influence of the Orient on the West is strongly supported: “Valuable books of eastern travel are abundant” (372).

The interest in Biblical prophecy is a major aspect of Poe’s essay. Poe does not question the certainty of the prophecies mentioned in the Bible. He says that there is no doubt or uncertainty in the interpretation of the prophecies associated with Egypt: “No events could be more wonderful in their nature, nor more impossible to have been foreseen by the eye of man, than the events foretold concerning it” (Griswold 374). Poe also says, “Mr. Keith, as our readers are aware, contends for the literal fulfilment of prophecy, and in the treatise in question brings forward a mass of evidence, and a world of argument, which we, at least, are constrained to consider, as a whole, irrefutable” (377). Keith, referred to by Poe, is another traveler to the East who was also aware of the Biblical prophecy about the Holy Land.

Poe discusses extensively the history of Egypt during the reign of the Pharaohs and the Roman reign until the Ottoman reign, relating it to the Biblical prophecies concerned with Egypt. For instance, Poe quotes from the Bible a verse, illustrating the prophetic importance of Egypt: “The Lord shall smite Egypt; he shall smite and heal it; and they shall return to the Lord, and he shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them. In that day shall Isaac be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land” (qtd. in Griswold 374). By concentrating on this verse, Poe attributes

the prosperous period that Egypt underwent during Mohammad Ali's reign to a part of this prophesy (Griswold 374). Although he is non-native to Egypt, Mohammad Ali made great accomplishments. During his reign, Egypt was strongly influential in military, economical, and educational fields. In addition to the "political power and importance" (374) of Egypt during Mohammad Ali's time, Poe says that even in the ancient times Egypt encountered powerful and peaceful periods, such as the safety of the Jews under the rule of the Pharaohs in Egypt, the construction of the Pyramids and the graves and other places of burial of those Pharaohs, and the monuments of the city Luxor and Carnac, which all have connection with the Biblical prophecies about Egypt (375).

Throughout the essay, Poe refers to two important Eastern books which are Morier's *Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople* and Chardin's *Travels in Persia*. Poe's quotation from Morier's book is about the social customs of the East: "Morier says, in his *Journey through Persia* — 'The manners of the East, amidst all the changes of government and religion, are still the same'" (Griswold 375). Poe also observes Morier's impression of the language of the East, that is decent, beautiful, having precision and exactness: "above all, the beauty, the accuracy, and the propriety of the language and the history of the Bible" (375). Poe seems more acquainted with the social habits and customs of the East in reading *Travels in Persia* by the French writer Sir John Chardin (1643-1713), which enriched his repertoire to have sufficient knowledge and perception of the East. Like Morier, Chardin is also interested in the social habits of the East and observing its unchangeability throughout history. The durability of the social habits of the East is the major point that Poe quotes from

Chardin's book, observing the "steadfast resistance to innovation [which] is a trait remarkably confined to the regions of biblical history" (375).

More significantly, the East for Poe is emblematic of the Biblical and prophetic visions and a place where the end of the world will occur. Poe emphasizes the significance and seriousness of "the East," which "will remain in force until it shall have fulfilled all the important purposes of Biblical elucidation" (Griswold 376). By evoking the end of the world, Poe concurrently refers to the changeability of the civilization from nation to nation as a cosmic phenomenon of this world. He explains that civilization will eventually return to its origins. Apparently, what is meant by the origin of the civilization in Poe's essay is the East. "And the tide of civilization," Poe states, "which has hitherto flowed continuously, from the rising to the setting sun, will be driven back, with a partial ebb, into its original channels" (376). Poe might mean that the Christian East which represents the origins of the Bible, as he often emphasizes through his essay, is the final habitat of civilization. Poe also seems to suggest that it is stated in the Bible that the East would create its civilization which would go through from sunshine to sunset, but then it will renovate itself and restore its power in the future.

Poe's essay is extensively full of references to the Middle Eastern regions, such as the Valley of Ghor, Gaza, Hebron or al-Khalīl, Jerusalem, Suez, and the Dead Sea. He also refers to the geography of Egypt and Palestine, connecting them with the Biblical prophesies, such as those related to Edom, Mount Sinai, the Mount Seir, the Dead Sea, and Gulf of Aqabah. The Red Sea and the miracle of Moses in splitting the sea is also discussed in the essay where Poe observes Stephen's investigation in the Gulf of Aqabah, as the exact place where Moses's miracle took place. Poe tries to establish the correctness

of this miracle. “The chief arguments sustaining this position,” Poe explains, “are deduced from the ease by which the miracle could have been wrought, on a sea so shaped, by means of a strong wind blowing from the northeast” (Griswold 388). After finishing travelling to Mount Sinai, Stephen was planning to head for Aqaba, and there he was able to meet the Bedouin who was in charge of accompanying him to show guidance, protection, and honor. He gave him a seal as a sign of respect and honor he was going to have from the Arabs they encountered him on his way to Aqaba (385). Poe seems to give a good impression of the Bedouins because of their good treatment to the travelers. He says that Stephen was provided with a Bedouin who was responsible for showing the way to Stephen by leading, directing, and advising him.

Poe extensively traces the geographical regions visited by Stephen, and he discusses how Stephen had the chance to visit the Prophet Joseph’s tomb in Palastine. Poe also points to the ancient and royal city Sebaste, which was built by the Israeli king Omri in 876 BC and visited by Stephen. The archeological city Jezreel, which is mentioned in the Bible, specifically in 1 Samuel 25.43 is observed by Poe as a city reached by Stephen. Then, Poe moves to another city of Stephen’s Journey, which is Nazareth or an-Nāšira in northern Palestine. Afterwards, he shows how Stephen directed his course to the Lake of Genesareth or Lake Tiberias and how he proceeded finally toward Tiberias, Saphet, Mount Carmel, Acre, Sour, and Sidon. Poe continues to refer to the Middle Eastern places that Stephen had visited and finally makes a list of the final cities to which Stephen travelled before he headed to Europe, coming from Beirut, which are Samaria, Galilee, Nablous, and Sychem.

After examining Poe's observations of Stephen's book, it can be inferred that Poe obviously sees Stephen as an unprejudiced observer. At the end of the essay, Poe distinguishes Stephen from such other travelers to the Middle East, such as Chateaubriand and Lamartine, concluding that Stephen's discussion is "free from the exaggerated sentimentality of Chateaubriand, or the sublimated, the too French enthusiasm of Lamartine" (Griswold 389).

### **Poe's "Palaestine"**

In this essay, Poe mainly focuses on the history of the Jews, showing sympathy with them and their plight throughout history. Poe notes that the Jewish people suffered during the Roman Empire, Crusades, and under the Saracens. This land, as Poe points out, underwent subsequent periods of damage because of the conflict between the Crusaders and Saracens, and this conflict "reduced this country, which has been extolled by Moses" (*Southern Literary Messenger* 152).

Poe also shows his interest in the etymology of the names of some Eastern regions, such as Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanese. The word Palestine owes its origin to a people who lived in this land, particularly the part next to the Mediterranean Sea in Judea called Philistines or "Philistæi" (*Southern Literary Messenger* 152). Poe also states that the reason for calling this region "the Holy Land" is because it is the place where the "birth, sufferings and death" of Jesus Christ all took place (152). Then Palestine is geographically presented to the reader as a visual map in his/her mind. This region as it is spread out by Poe is "bounded on the north by Syria, on the east by Arabia Deserta, on the south by Arabia Petrea, and on the west by the Mediterranean" (152).

Similar to “Review of Stephen’s Arabia Petrae,” Poe’s “Palaestine” also focuses on the geography of the Middle East, especially the Holy Lands, such as lakes, rivers (Litani and Jordan), and cities with historical events related to them. Poe gives a special importance to the geographical areas in Palestine which are mentioned in the Bible, such as the lake of Samochon or Merom as it is mentioned in the book of Joshua "waters of Merom," (11.5 ). This lake is formed from the Jordan River. Poe obviously sheds light on the Jordan River for its Biblical importance. The river is presented in the Bible as a symbol of fecundity and richness, and it was called “the garden of the Lord”: “Lot looked about him, and saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zo’ar; this was before the Lord has destroyed Sod’om and Go.mor’rah” (Genesis 13.10). Being interested in the origin of names, Poe says that the Hebrew word “Jardan” seems to be the origin of the word Jordan because of the “the river’s rapid ‘descent’ through the country” and this is the original meaning of the Hebrew word (*Southern Literary Messenger* 153). Poe then moves to the Dead Sea and is also interested in origin of the name of the sea. The sea, Poe explains, was called previously “Asphaltites” and this is because of the mineral substances found in this sea, such as “asphaltos, or bitumen” (153).

After presenting the origin of the words Jordan and Palestine, Poe explains the origin of the meaning of Lebanon. “The country,” Poe writes, “is mountainous. The range of Libanus, so named on account of their snowy summits, from the Hebrew “Lebanon,” or “white,” is imperfectly defined” (*Southern Literary Messenger* 153). Poe also shows his interest for the area in Lebanon, which is overlapped with the Palestinian region in North Galilea. Poe briefly describes the nature of Lebanon, which reflects a beautiful

landscape to its readers: “But the name of Libanus is sometimes given to several chains, which run through the whole extent of Palæstine. Between two of these ranges lay a valley so beautiful that some have called it a terrestrial Paradise” (153). The greenery of this region, Poe points out, is never ending, having, “perpetual spring — [and] the trees are always green, and the orchards full of fruit” (153). Poe’s descriptions reflect the picturesque nature of Lebanon. Poe is clearly fascinated by the beauty of the landscapes of Lebanon, and the natural elements of this region enriched his poetry.

The essay deals totally with the history of Palestine from the view point of the Christians and the Jews, and mainly traces the regions mentioned in the Bible (New Testament and Old Testament). It never refers to the history of Palestine when it was ruled by the Moslems. Neither famous battles nor major accomplishments were mentioned in the essay. The estrangement with Moslems is evident in this essay and can be seen as one of its flaws. Although Poe was not critical of the Arabs or Moslems, he felt indifference, or at minimum turned a blind eye to the rich history of Palestine and the Moslems.

Unfortunately, as an active reader of the Qur’an, Poe did not refer to the sacred importance of Jerusalem for Moslems, as a sacred region mentioned in the Qur’an. The famous event that the Moslems believe it took place in this region is called “Isra and Mi’raj” or the Night Journey of Mohammad. In spite of the influence of the Night Journey of Mohammad on Poe’s *Al-Aaraaf*, Poe does not refer to it in the essay. Poe’s silence on this important event indicates his apparent prejudice. To be fair, the essay should exclude no group of people or religions that considered the region of Palestine as a religious region whether Jews, Christians, or Moslems. As an American Orientalist,



Poe's prejudice is fostered by Said's observation to the Western "Orientalist" as a "poet" or "scholar" who "makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West" (Leitch 1882).

For Poe, Islam and the Qur'an were apparently seen as a mere exotic world and a ripe world of fictitious stories and beliefs. His view of this world is an absolute artistic view or source of inspiration. It is impossible to find any evidence that Poe's Christian faith was shaken at all when he was influenced by the Islamic world and its beliefs. His adherence to Christianity and apparent sympathy with the Jews, and his protest against the "Turkish yoke" over the region of Palestine (*Southern Literary Messenger* 152) are all aspects denote Poe's mere influence by, though inspired by the oneness of God in the Islamic religion, not belief in the concepts of the Islamic Orient.

### **Poe's *Poems: Second Edition* (1831)**

This collection of poetry is one of the early collections of Poe and his third published work. It was first published in 1831. By exploring the collection, it is clear to see Poe's fascination with the beauty and exoticism of the Near Orient. In "Poe's Poetry of the Exotic," Yothers observes that "Poe's first volume of poetry, as its title indicates, highlights travel and the exotic on a grand scale" (23). Travis Montgomery also explains that the collection represents powerful borrowings from Middle Eastern literature, especially in the poems *Tamerlane*, *Al-Aaraaf*, and *The Doomed City* ("Turning East: Poe's 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse" 2). This collection enabled Poe to establish himself as a professional and successful poet. By adopting the Near Orient as a new source of imagery, Poe's collection deviated from the traditional path of American

poetry that followed the American Lake School (3). Poe, Montgomery observes, struggled to “signal his radical departure from dominant aesthetic trends in the American literary world” (4). Since he is a Romantic poet, it is normal for Poe to be influenced by other Romantic poets contemporary with him.

The Romantic poets nourished Poe’s imagination and poeticism in relation to the Near Orient. The Orient was a fertile source in the most prominent literary works of the most famous Romantic poets, such as Byron, Beckford, Moore, Coleridge, and others. After revising his collection, Poe tried to advertise this collection by expressing his creative genius and poetic dexterity. Throughout this collection, he tried to prove his “artistic maturity,” having the confidence that this collection “may have some chance of being seen by posterity” (*Poems*, 13, 14). He, Montgomery observes, urges the readers to valorize this anthology as a work of originality that deserves “admiration” and “preservation” (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse” 2).

Throughout his scrutiny of the collection, Montgomery attributes the borrowings of Poe’s work to the “artistic milieu” or the common culture where the influence of the British Romantic poets was dominant (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse” 2). Before revising the collection, Poe was accused of “literary thefts” (1). After it was amended, the collection reflected Poe’s strong desire for the authenticity of the literary work, and this is represented as an important aspect of this collection. The shift toward acquiring the major themes of the British Romantic poets indicates the reason that Poe planned to break the chains of what he saw as the trite traditions of American poetry (3). This shift also provided Poe a “map of the transatlantic

literary world” (3) where the Near Orient is a substantial part of this world. One of the major reasons of Poe’s collection, Montgomery remarks, is to provide freshness to the American verse and to “revitalize” it (3).

The Orient or more specifically the Middle East is predominantly presented in the collection. There is a conspicuous absence of the American nationalism on which Poe was supposed to focus in this period where America was occupied with the devotion to its interests and culture as a young independent nation. Poe’s reluctance to tackle the big issues of America in this collection caused great surprise. Montgomery argues that Poe, in his collection, may have been determined to keep politics away from the artistic domain (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 Poems and the Renewal of American Verse” 3). Poe was actually reasonable and bold in making the Middle East a matter of study and discussion when it was represented in a framework of “cruelty, despotism, and ignorance” (9).

The Near Orient in Poe’s collection served as a means for figurative and metaphorical use and also for “artistic freedom” from restriction and triteness of the conventional modes of American verse (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 Poems and the Renewal of American Verse” 6). “By upholding ‘the East,’” Montgomery points out, “as his aesthetic ideal, Poe effectively rejects ‘the West,’ which symbolizes British and American traditions, including but not limited to Lake School verse, that he finds banal” (3). Poe makes it clear in his essay “Letter to Mr. —” that it is hard to create new artistic expressions in American poetry if American poets are still dependent on the British literary styles and patterns (4). Poe’s main view is that American literature will not enjoy immortality if it continues adhering to the fanatical devotion to the national culture and

unawareness of international cultures. There is a clear message in this collection that instigated other American poets to reject the “allurement” and “seductions” of the patriotic motivations for the sake of cementing a mold of literary imaginative and creative works (3).

Throughout his collection, Poe strongly tried to vigorously push his contemporary writers to reject the “imaginative enslavement to a literary school or tradition” (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 Poems and the Renewal of American Verse” 4). In his essay “Letter to Mr. —,” Poe makes a strong invitation to turn to the insight and knowledge of other cultures in the world through which the American writer can achieve prominence and fame. “You are aware,” he says, “of the great barrier in the path of an American writer. He is read, if at all, in preference to the combined and established wit of the world” (*Poems* 16). The strong presence of the Near Orient in Poe’s volume of poetry reflects his ambition as a poet. In a word, Poe fervently longed for superiority by an achievement in this collection and also for “renew[ing] American verse” (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 Poems and the Renewal of American Verse” 3).

### **The Middle Eastern Influence on Poe’s *Poems: Second Edition* (1831)**

The major poems in the collection in which the Near Orient has a strong influence on Poe are *Israfel*, *To Helen*, *The Doomed City*, and *Al-Aaraaf*. In his masterpiece *Israfel*, Poe is clearly inspired by the angel Israfel found in the Islamic religion. Poe’s inspiration is plainly understood from a note he wrote as an epigraph to the poem, which says, “And the angel Israfel who has the sweetest voice of all God’s creatures. — KORAN” (*Poems*, 43). The name Israfel is actually not found verbatim in the Qur’an but

in the interpretations of the Qur'an. Poe read the story of Israfil, which is found in Sale's *The Preliminary Discourse*. "Poe's subtitle note," Einboden observes, "originates not from the Quran itself (which never explicitly names Israfil), but rather from the introduction to George Sale's (1697-1736) well-known translation, his *The Koran Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mohammed*. First published in 1734...paraphrased and extended by Poe" (8).

According to the Holy Quran, Israfil is ordered to blow the trumpet on Doomsday. God says, "The day when the trumpet is blown, so you come forth in hosts" (Sale 78.18). In *Israfil*, Poe's poetic talent is actually saturated by the Qur'anic imagery. He appears so knowledgeable about the Islamic view of Doomsday and also the angel Israfil. Thorpe writes that the poem shows "Christian source[s] in a thoroughly non-Christian way" (399). Indeed, Poe does not only rely on the Bible to give the apocalyptic view in the poem, but he also uses the Qur'anic imagery related to the situation of the universe at the end of the world.

In the poem, Israfil is presented as a player of a lute. As a master of the narratives of terror and macabre, Poe might have intended to relate the euphony of Israfil's sound in the poem to the horrific events that will happen after he blows the trumpet according to the Islamic doctrine. Nevertheless, Poe seems to employ the Qur'anic imagery for his poetic and artistic imagination and also for mythological purposes. For example, he replaces Israfil's trumpet with a lyre or a lute to strip Israfil of any religious significance and give this figure mythological and poetic significance like Apollo, the god of music who plays the most tuneful and melodious notes on his lyre.

Throughout the poem, the speaker shows how the stars became speechless upon hearing the music of Israfil: “And the giddy stars are mute” (5). Here, there is a close relation between Poe’s image of “the giddy stars” and the chaotic situation of the human beings when they are raised after the second blast of Israfil’s trumpet as discussed in the Qur’an. The plural word “the stars” in Poe’s poem is a collective form that resembles the Qur’anic image of the like-intoxicated crowded people who will witness Israfil’s blasts of his trumpet. Because of the second blast, humans on earth will be greatly agitated, confused, and disturbed as they are gathered on the Day of Judgment in huge groups. What supports the similarity of Poe’s image related to the dizziness of the personified stars is the connection between the feeling of fainting or losing consciousness and the first blast of the trumpet as shown in this verse from the Qur’an: “Wherefore leave them, until they arrive at their day wherein they shall swoon for fear” (Sale 52. 45).

Sale makes it clear throughout a note related to this verse that “the first sound of the trumpet” (392) causes the spontaneous loss of consciousness of humans. What’s more, the word giddy, in Poe’s poem, gives the meaning of the rapid whirling and the tendency to fall. It also implies the state to totter, stagger, or reel. Similarly, the people who are going to witness the punishment of God in the Day of Judgment will be in a state similar to drunk people, but they will not be literally drunk. To further clarify the analogy, in Sale’s translation, there is a depiction of the state of the people who will witness the awes of Doomsday and will be metaphorically intoxicated: “On the day whereon ye shall see it, every woman who giveth suck shall forget the infant which she suckleth, and every female that is with young shall cast her burden; and thou shalt see

men seemingly drunk, yet they shall not be really drunk: but the punishment of God will be severe” (The Pilgrimage 2).

Both in the poem and the Qur’an, the expressions of drunkenness and giddiness seem to have a similar implication— which both depict the unstable and whirling state of people as if they are affected by an extreme astonishment. Poe invests the Qur’anic macabre depiction and representation of Israfel to invent creative and vivid imagery. He is unarguably inspired by the idea of ecstasy represented in the Qur’an and related to the angel Israfel, and it thus enabled him to invigorate the lyrical elements of the poem and consolidate its musicality.

The most prominent figure that reflects Poe’s inspiration in the Qur’an in his poem is his reference to the female virgins mentioned in the Qur’an known as “Houris.” In his notes of Israfel, Mabbott explains that “the houris are the nymphs of the Mahometan paradise; the name comes through the French from the Persian huri, and is derived from an Arabic word referring to the dark eyes of these ladies, like those of a gazelle” (177). Commenting on the poem, Montgomery says that “Houris,” according to the religion of Islam, are “the lovely virgins in paradise” (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse” 8).

In the poem, Poe says that in the heavenly world where Israfel lives, there are beautiful virgins of the Moslem paradise: “Where Houri glances are — /— Stay! turn thine eyes afar!” (20-21). Poe does not only refer to the Arabic name of virgin women “Houris,” but he is, in fact, inspired by the Qur’anic imagery related to these pure and perfect virgins. By focusing on the looks of the virgins’ eyes, Poe proves himself a genius in dealing with these exotic female creatures. He says that these female virgins keep their

looks hidden and they look stand at a great distance: “turn thine eyes afar” (22). Poe clearly borrows the concept of the “Houris” from the descriptions found in the Qur’an. Keeping the eyes away is an inherent quality of the houris because they are, according to the Qur’an, created only for the happiness of their spouses in Heaven.

In the chapter named “Those who rank themselves in order” of Sale’s translation, there is an accurate depiction of the “Houris,” including their looks and eyes: “And near them shall lie the virgins of paradise, refraining their looks from beholding any besides their spouses, having large black eyes, and resembling the eggs of an ostrich covered with feathers from the dust” (337). Sale explains that the exotic appearance of the houri whose skin compared to the eggs of an ostrich is presented as a token of her extreme whiteness because houris in the Qur’an are compared later to the pearls as being purely white. “This,” Sale points out, “may seem an odd comparison to an European; but the orientals think nothing comes so near the colour of a fine woman’s skin as that of an ostrich’s egg when kept perfectly clean” (337). In Qamoos Almaani [The dictionary of meanings], there is a linguistic explanation about the word “hour,” which means the women who have the condition of having an intense whiteness of the visible part of the eyeball and an intense blackness of the iris (“Hour”).

To further explain the reference of the “Houris” in Poe’s other works, the term Houris is referred to again in Poe’s *Ligeia*. In the story, Poe extensively describes the physical description of a beautiful dead woman who is apparently the beloved of the narrator. Poe makes an effort to establish the physical feature of Ligeia’s face. While pondering her face, Poe describes Ligeia with extraordinary words as being “faultless,” “strange,” and “exquisite” (Mabbott 312). Then, Poe describes Ligeia’s eyes which are



“far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race... [and] than the fullest of the gazelle[d] eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad” (313).

Poe actually gives indirect references to the description of the Qur’anic Houri and then he refers to it directly, saying, “her beauty... [is] the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk” (Mabbott 313). It can be inferred that the quality of the expanding eyes of Ligeia parallels the largeness of the eyes of the Qur’anic “Houris” who are “having large black eyes” (Sale 56.23). Al-Saadi, another famous exegetist of the Qur’an, supports the point about the largeness of the eyes of the houris. “The Houri,” he says, “has the best eyes and larger than the normal ones” (Tafseer [The exegesis] of Al-Saadi 991).

Poe emphatically refers to the expansion of the eyes of the “houri” in *Ligeia* as being “large,” “larger,” and “fullest” (Mabbott 313). Poe goes further in his engagement to the imagery of the houri in the Qur’an. He refers to the whiteness of the “houri” to compare it to the whiteness of his dead beloved. In the Qur’an, the houris are described as being extremely white virgins because they are metaphorically compared to pearls: “And there shall accompany them fair damsels having large black eyes; resembling pearls hidden in their shells” (Sale 56.22). Poe, however, uses ivory imagery instead of pearls imagery to refer to the intense whiteness of Ligeia: “the skin rivalling the purest ivory” (Mabbott 312).

In *Israfel*, Poe clearly elevates and exalts Israfel and the world where he lives as well: “Thou art not, therefore, wrong/ Israfeli, who despisest /An unimpassion’d song” (24-26). In this way, the song that lacks passion seems to belong to the poet himself as a human being which differs from the sweet heavenly song of Israfel which is full of passion, ecstasy, and overwhelming love. Montgomery argues that the state that Poe

describes is the distinction between the dull, unimaginative poet, who impliedly has the “unimpassioned song,” and the heavenly angel, who has the elevating song, and is attributed to Poe’s feelings of regret and disappointment (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse” 10). These feelings, Montgomery thinks, are caused because of the adherence of the American poets to the traditional norms in writing poetry: “The situation of the earthbound poet who makes only uninspired music parallels the plight of the American writer enslaved to poetic convention and doomed to produce insipid, imitative verse” (10).

In *To Helen*, the first poem of the collection, the Middle East is plainly manifested. In the first stanza, Poe refers to the ancient city of Nicaea which is located in northwestern Anatolia which now includes most parts of Turkey: “Helen, thy beauty is to me/ Like those Nicean barks of yore” (1-2). Although *To Helen* has a Greek and Roman framework, the implied message of the poem is made to shed light on the Near Orient, especially the Holy Land. Throughout the poem, Poe describes the sea where the ships sail as a sea covered with fragrant odor and pleasing, agreeable scent, bearing in mind the Mediterranean Sea where the Holy Land is located. At the beginning of the poem, Poe indirectly refers to the Holy Land (Palestine) where the indescribable beauty of Helen is implicitly representative of the beauty of the Holy Land. Poe refers to an unknown person who is physically fatigued and carried by these sailing ships of Nicaea to “his own native shore” (5). The person about whom Poe talks could be himself. The speaker actually likens himself to a pilgrim who started a very long journey for the Holy Land, and he feels fatigued as a result. The speaker could also be the traveler Stephen Olin whose book is reexamined by Poe as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

In the collected works of Edgar Allan Poe, an unknown commentator, Mabbott points out, gave himself the name “A Galwegian,” and appeared in the journal *Notes and Queries* in London (169). This commentator says that the unidentified person in *To Helen* might be Alexander the Great because as Strabo, the Greek historian noted that Alexander “built a fleet at Nicaea on the Hydraspes in India, and might have sailed over a sea perfumed from the spice trees of India and Arabia” (Mabbott 169). This is one of the assumptions that might have motivated Poe to mention Nicaea as an Oriental city where Alexander started his journey to other Oriental regions, such as Arabia and India. The second assumption that supports the idea that Alexander sailed from this city is that the commentator infers that Alexander was a conqueror whose armies reached remote regions and that he never returned to his homeland: “Alexander was victorious, but he never got home to his native shore at all. He died at Babylon and was entombed at Alexandria in Egypt” (169). Here, Poe might have had the image of the long journeys of Alexander and his subsequent conquests in his mind so that he implicitly sheds light on his strong desire to reach the Near Orient, especially the Holy Land.

In *The Doomed City*, Poe makes many references to the Near Orient, such as references to regions or to the Holy Quran. Poe starts his poem by referring to an unidentified city as “a strange city” to make it take multiple interpretations. At any rate, the first Oriental region that is clear to notice in the poem is Babylon. Though Poe does not directly refer to his city in the poem as being Babylon, it is understood from the description related to this ancient city. This unknown city that Poe mentions in the poem has large walls as those in Babylon: “Up fanes – up Babylon-like walls – /Up many a

melancholy shrine” (27-28). Poe first refers to the most remarkable monuments of the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia and then mentions the name of the Babylonian walls:

There shrines, and palaces, and towers  
Are — not like any thing of ours —  
O! no — O! no — ours never loom  
To heaven with that ungodly gloom! (6-9)

The ancient civilization of Babylon excelled in geometry and architecture. The ancient of people of Babylon, Curl observes, were skilled in constructing the places where devotion is paid to the deities (52). They built also large and stately mansions with tall and slender structures used for observation and signaling (52). Their art in architecture was sophisticated as the “staged towers, known as ziggurats, and resembling a pile of diminishing square platforms, each stage smaller than that below, were associated with temples” (52). The most well-known examples of these complicated buildings are the triangular temple towers which are known as “the enormous ziggurat at Ur (C22 BC), with huge staircases giving access to the sanctuary on top” (52).

It can be deduced that the Babylonian buildings are given the qualities of exoticism and magnification. In the poem, Poe cryptically refers to the possessive form “ours.” He says that “our” buildings do not have the quality of massiveness and magnificence: “There shrines, and palaces, and towers /Are — not like any thing of ours —“(6-7). Poe might mean here that the large buildings of Babylon are hugely different from the constructions of his age. Montgomery says that the reference of the “Babylon-like walls” is a clear reference to the Orient. He explains that Poe is interested in depicting the ancient large and pompous buildings in his poem. Therefore, Montgomery describes Poe’s *The Doomed City* as “ekphrastic verse,” which gives a vivid description to the strange and frightening splendor of a city in the sea that underwent an extensive

destruction and damage. The exoticism of the ancient, magnificent walls and buildings in this poem resembles the exoticism of Israfel's music which both, as Montgomery points out, reflect "uncanny Otherness" ("Turning East: Poe's 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse" 7).

To disambiguate the identity of the city that Poe might have intended to mention in the poem, there is a prophesy in the Bible related to Babylon which predicts the doom of this city. Campbell observes that an unidentified writer naming himself "H.J." writes in "E.A. Poe: An Unnoticed Plagiarism" published in *The Academy*, confirming the reference to Babylon in Poe's *The Doomed City* (208). Commenting on the poem, this writer says that Poe took the idea of the cherished city from the Bible in the Book of Isaiah, which refers to the terrible fate and inevitable destruction of the city of Babylon as a punishment for the deliberate disobedience to God: "She'ol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come; it rouses the shades to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth; it raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations" (14.9).

However, Gomorrah is another Oriental city that Poe seems to refer to in the poem. This city is mentioned in the Bible and was punished by God. Poe apparently describes the submerged city historically. Pound says that the popular and historical stories related to the Dead Sea made Poe to focus on the regions of the Dead Sea. "Poe," Pound remarks, "was interested in the legends of the Dead Sea" (24). In *Al-Aaraaf*, Poe writes a note, claiming that several cities located on the Dead Sea were submerged and overwhelmed completely: "there were undoubtedly more than two cities engulfed in the 'dead sea.' In the valley of Siddim were five Adrah, Zebion, Zoar, Sodom, and Gomorrah. Stephen of Byzantium mentions eight and Strabo thirteen, (engulfed) — but

the last is out of all reason” (Mabbott 107). Pound continues that the city might have been submerged after having been severely inflicted by God’s punishment. “The dead city,” Pound explains, “may later have covered the plain where were the five wicked cities of the vale of Siddim and its origin may be associated with the main legend, but their annihilation did not come from its waves but more terribly” (25).

Further, Poe might have also been influenced by the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Qur’an. Although the exact name of the city is not exactly mentioned in the Qur’an, the story of this city parallels the story in the Bible. The punishment of the inhabitants of the people of Gomorrah in the Qur’an is also similar to the description of the punishment mentioned in the Bible: “And when our command came, we turned those cities upside down, and we rained upon them stones of baked clay, one following another, and being marked from thy Lord; and they are not far distant from those who act unjustly” (Sale 11.82-83).

As the poem progresses, Poe is aware of the apocalyptic verses of the Qur’an. Some lines of the poem illustrate some descriptions of the Qur’anic apocalypse. The city in the poem might also be a metaphor for the whole world. Two lines in Poe’s poem highly parallel two verses from a chapter named “The Folding” in the Qur’an. One line is related to the state of the sea on Doomsday which is going to be glowing according to the Qur’an: “and when the seas shall boil” (Sale 18.6). The other line describes the state of Hell in undergoing fierce combustion in the Day of Judgment: “and when hell shall burn fiercely” (12). Poe expresses the glowing of the sea in a different way: “The waves have now a redder glow – “(51). The redness of the waves and sea in the poem parallels the Qur’anic image of the boiling sea. Poe also relates the fierce burning of the sea to the

increasing severity of Hell: “Hell rising from a thousand thrones” (55). Poe obviously bears in mind the image of Hell and its “fierce burning” in the Qur’an to depict it in the poem. Both the Qur’anic image and Poe’s image of Hell refer to the redness of Hell in having intense and terrible heat with highest temperature.

More interestingly, there is a reference to the towers and death as in “Death looks gigantically down” and “As if the towers had thrown aside” (47). The connection between the towers and death in the poem is expressed in the Qur’an to refer to the inevitability of death from which no one escapes: “Wheresoever ye be, death will overtake you, although ye be in lofty towers” (Sale 4.78). So, the Qur’anic verse and Poe’s lines all give a vivid and descriptive image about death. Both uses of imagery related to death are visual imageries put in the mind of the reader as a mental picture of the well-constructed, fortified, and protected towers that can not resist the abrupt conquest of gigantic death. A closer look at *Tamerlane* indicates that Poe apparently employs the Qur’anic image of death and tower to intensify the inevitability of death: “The gay wall of this gaudy tower/ Grows dim around me — death is near” (16-17).

The other point in the poem that demonstrates Poe’s influence by the Qur’anic imagery is that God does not view the heaven or the sky with contempt or hatred: “A heaven that God doth not condemn/ with stars is like a diadem — /we liken our ladies’ eyes to them” (13-15). In the Qur’an, the sky is created and beautified with stars to brighten the sky: “We have adorned the lower heaven with the ornament of the stars” (Sale 37.5). Similarly, Poe in the poem gives the sky a stately description accompanied with extraordinary beauty likened to a jeweled headband worn as a symbol of sovereignty. The image of describing the sky in the Qur’an plainly resembles Poe’s. The

stars in the Qur'an are described as illuminating objects that reflect glitter in the sky. The decorative description of the stars of both images are analogous to one another to show the pleasing, attractive, and decorative qualities of the stars which ornament the sky.

The most fascinating point that most likely inspired Poe in the poem is the beautiful image in the Qur'an that describes the thinness and translucency of the heaven. Throughout the poem, Poe says that the towers of the strange city produce gaseous air in the sky: "As if the turret-tops had given / A vacuum in the filmy heaven" (50). The adjectival phrase "filmy heaven" draws the attention of the readers, especially those who are perceptive about the Qur'an. As presented in the Qur'an, the heaven or the sky is described as a huge woven or knitted object which in Arabic is termed "Hubuk": "wa alsmā dat alhubuk [By the heaven furnished with paths]" (Sale 389). In a note that interprets this verse, Sale says that "the paths or orbs of the stars, or the streaks which appear in the sky like paths, being thin and extended clouds" (389). Although Sale does not mention the word "fabric," which is related to the Arabic word "hubuk," he refers to the filminess or thinness of the heaven which is a characteristic of fabric. The word "Hubuk" in the Qur'an comes as a quality God gave to the heaven. According to the Dictionary of Al-Waseet, one meaning of "Hubuk" in the Arabic language is woven clothing and it comes also with the word "work" as in "amal mahbook" which means woven work ("Hubuk"). To put it another way, this means work that is well-done, well-organized, and complicated. According to American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, the adjective filmy in Poe's poem means an object that resembles film in thinness and translucence ("filmy"). It also means a gauzy thing, and the adjective gauzy comes from the noun gauze, which means a thin and transparent fabric with a loose open



weave used for curtains and clothing. The Arab physicist and scientific expert in the Qur'an Ali Mansour Al-Kayali points out that the heaven in the Holy Quran is described as a woven object. "The heaven," he observes, "is truly a universal fabric; it is densely and finely woven as fabric" ("Ali Mansour- what is the meaning of Hubuk?"). It can be inferred here that the phrase "the filmy heaven" Poe uses in the poem refers to the Qur'anic image, which shows the intricate and sophisticated structure of the heaven created as the complication and thinness of fabric.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE ALLURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

### IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S *AL-AARAAF*

“Al Aaraaf,” Mabbott writes, “is the most difficult of Poe’s poems, as well as the longest” (92). Despite its difficulty, “many lovers of poetry have read it with pleasure” (92). *Al-Aaraaf* is deservedly named a mosaic. It is a kaleidoscopic and multi-faceted display of the universe: the physical world and the spiritual one. It gives a vivid depiction of the natural elements of imaginative places in the heaven. It marvelously depicts the form of the sky visible to earth where the comets move from place to place in addition to the trembling of the stars and the description of the universe inspired by the Qur’an. It is also a mystical piece of writing. It broods over spiritual matters such as, visual observation of spiritual beings and places, deep imagining of the form of God, special emphasis on the oneness of God; and pictorial representation of the universe as the moon, the sun, the sky, and the stars.

Poe’s *Al-Aaraaf* marks the acme of Poe’s influence by the Middle East. It is a bifurcated poem, consisting of two parts and four hundred and twenty three lines. The Oriental imagery pervades thickly throughout the poem. The poem, as Yother observes, is “built around references to both Islam and the early history of Christianity in the Near East” (55). “Al Aaraaf”, Montgomery, too, explains, “overflows with references to the Middle East” (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse” 18). In the poem, Poe contemplates the Moslem Paradise and afterlife. The main Qur’anic references to afterlife found in the poem are Hell, Heaven, the angels, ‘Al-Araf,’ the place of purgatory in Islamic tradition, the destiny of men in this place, the description of

the female virgin in Paradise (houris), and the throne of God. Although the star mentioned in the poem is intended to refer to Tycho Brahe's discovery of a supernova in 1572, the poem makes an amalgam of references to the Middle Eastern ancient civilizations, the religion of Islam, the traditions of the Eastern habitants, and other religions of the Middle East. The reference to the Persian Sufi poet Saadi Shirazi (1210-1291), especially to his famous work *Gulisten* betokens Poe's influence by Eastern literature.

The Qur'anic imagery spreads widely over *Al-Aaraaf*. Since the title alludes to the Arabic language or the Qur'anic place, the poem is indeed amenable to the Oriental analysis. It prepares the reader for an Eastern journey to different Oriental places, beliefs, images, and events. In "The Early American Qur'an: Islamic Scripture and US Canon," Einboden points out that Poe's *Al-Aaraaf* is "superimposing a Quranic sura upon his American verses" (7). Explaining the meaning of "Al-Araf" and the story related to it in the Qur'an, Poe writes:

With the Arabians there is a medium between Heaven and Hell, where men suffer no punishment, but yet do not attain that tranquil and even happiness which they suppose to be characteristic of heavenly enjoyment...Sorrow is not excluded from "Al Aaraaf," but it is that sorrow which the living love to cherish for the dead, and which, in some minds, resembles the delirium of opium. The passionate excitement of Love and the buoyancy of spirit attendant upon intoxication are its less holy pleasures — the price of which, to those souls who make choice of "Al Aaraaf" as their residence after life, is final death and annihilation. (Hatch and Dunning 34)

Commenting on this note, Einboden writes that "Poe also clearly recognizes that his Arabic loan-word would be meaningless to most Bostonians in 1829, prompting him to provide an explanatory footnote to his borrowed title, parsing "Al-Aaraaf" through a

small-print annotation” (7-8). Most of the points that Poe discusses here related to the meaning of “Al-Aaraaf” are similar to the Qur’anic discussion of that place. But the clear difference between Poe’s “Al-Aaraaf” and the Qur’anic “Al-Araf” is the final destiny of the men in this region. Poe says that “Al-Aaraaf” in the poem is a place where the men will face “death and annihilation” (34). However, in the Qur’an, there is a possibility that the men who are on the “Al-Araf” will enter Paradise after displaying extreme eagerness and alacrity.

Poe’s note about the meaning of “Al-Araf” gives strong evidence of the power of the imagery and language of the Qur’an on the poem. The most probable version of the Qur’an that influenced Poe to write *Al-Aaraaf* is the translation of the Qur’an made by the English Orientalist George Sale. Poe apparently read Sale’s *The Preliminary Discourse*, as well, which gives an extensive exegesis of the Qur’an. According to Yother, “Al-Aaraaf seems to build on the discussion of this tradition from the introductory materials to George Sale’s translation of the Qur’an, originally published in 1734” (“Desert of the Blest: Poe’s Anti-Representational Invocations of the Near East” 55). “Poe presumably,” Mabbott also explains, “consulted Sale’s English version of the Qur’an, first published in 1734 and cited frequently by Moore in *Lalla Rookh*. The seventh chapter is called ‘Al Ârâf” (95). In “The Near East,” Montgomery observes that “Poe was no Arabic scholar, and he used works like Sale’s and Moore’s to interpret Muslim cultures;” (53).

Montgomery, in “Turning East: Poe’s 1831 Poems and the Renewal of American Verse,” confirms that the place “Al-Araf” referred to in the Qur’an is the source on which Poe relied to write his *Al-Aaraaf*. “His ‘Al Aaraaf,’” he writes, “is vaguely reminiscent of

the ala'raf described in Sura Seven of the Qur'an" (8). Mabbott states that the most evident passage in this chapter Poe read and by which he was influenced is found in verse forty-six which says, "And between the blessed and the damned there shall be a veil; and men shall stand on Al Arâf who shall know every one of them by their marks; and shall call unto the inhabitants of paradise, saying, Peace be upon you: yet they shall not enter therein, although they earnestly desire it" (Sale 7.46). In a note that explains this verse, the men on "Al-Araf," Sale says, will have a severe anxiety and torment with the sight of Paradise and the absolute happiness inside it they think it is unobtainable: "and will be tantalized here for a certain time with a bare view of the felicity of that place" (111). After God hears the men on "Al-Araf" talk with each other and make an oath that they will be deprived of entering paradise, God will allow them to enter paradise as a mercy bestowed upon them: "'Are these the men on whom ye swear that God would not bestow mercy? Enter ye into paradise; there shall come no fear on you, neither shall ye be grieved'" (Sale 7.49). Poe purposefully chooses the situation of the men in the Qur'anic "Al-Araf" to form his poem. He is adroit with dealing with the stimulation of the feelings of the speaker in the poem: "and there – oh! May my weary spirit dwell – / Apart from Heaven's eternity– and yet how far from hell" (331-332). The psychological torment of the men in the Qur'anic "Al-Araf" caused by viewing Paradise without being able to enter is emphasized by Poe in his poem because their situation is felicitous for Poe and his theory of poetry discussed in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition," which emphasizes the "intense excitement" that poetry should reflect and arouse "the sensitive soul to tears" (Leitch and Cain 642).

However, the destiny of men in Poe's *Al-Aaraaf* differs from the Qur'anic understanding of destiny. In "Some Notes on Al-Aaraaf," Cairns also writes that "Poe takes even greater liberties with the meaning of the term than with its orthography" (37). Poe intentionally diverges from the Qur'anic concept of the destiny of the men on "Al-Araf" to give himself some authenticity and originality. Montgomery emphasizes Poe's divergence from some points of the original story of "Al-Araf." "The original ala'raf," he writes, "lacks, however, such amenities. Additionally, while the Qur'anic people of the heights long for deliverance, the inhabitants of Poe's star slumber peacefully" ("Turning East: Poe's 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse" 8).

In George Sale's translation of the Qur'an, which inspired Poe to mold his poetic structure of his poem, Sale says in *The Preliminary Discourse*, that "Al-Araf" is:

A wall or partition . . . between (Heaven) and Hell . . . They call it al Urf. . . in the plural al Araf, from . . . arafa . . . to distinguish between things or to part them. . . those who stand on this partition will know and distinguish the blessed from the damned . . . and others say the word . . . intends anything. . . high raised or elevated . . . The Mahometan writers . . . differ as to the persons . . . on al Araf. Some imagine it to be a sort of limbo. . . Others place here such whose good and evil works are so equal that they exactly counterpoise each other, and therefore deserve neither reward nor punishment and will, on the last day be admitted to paradise, after they perform an act of adoration, which will . . . make the scale of their good works to overbalance. (Wherry 151-152)

Here, the gender of the people who stand on "Al-Araf" is male as understood from the Qur'an. Likewise, there is also a reference to the male gender people in Poe's *Al-Aaraaf*: "we paused before the heritage of men, / and thy star trembled — as doth Beauty then" (418-419). The last part of Poe's poem is, however, perplexing. It is either incomplete or deliberately ends to illustrate that the fate of the men of the abode of "Al-Aaraaf" is

perdition; it is also unclear in the poem where the eternal damnation of those men will be: in Hell or in another place. If Poe intended to end the poem with the annihilation of those men, the poem would be seen as a tragedy that depicts the tragic end of the residents of “Al-Aaraaf,” presumably in Hell as opposed to Paradise.

Poe’s *Al-Aaraaf* has been sharply castigated. In his edition of Poe’s poems, Campbell writes, “Al Aaraaf is the most formless and the most fragmentary of all of Poe’s poems” (173). He says that the poem lacks coherence and “without any well-defined middle or end” (173). Poe is clearly “entangled in the maze of ideas and images that his fancy had conjured-up” (173). Apparently, Poe’s fascination with the imagery of the Qur’an and the imagery of Saadi’s *Gulistan* caused him to focus on poetic flow rather than focusing on the organization or singularity of one idea or setting. Because of this, the poem has not been sufficiently noticed and this is clearly due to the abstruse features of the poem. “Because of its obscurity,” Campbell remarks, “the poem has scarcely received justice at the hands of the critics and commentators on Poe, most of whom have either ignored it altogether or have dwelt on its imperfections to the exclusion of all else” (173). Further, the reason behind ignoring the poem may be attributable to lack of deep understanding of the Qur’anic figures and references with which the poem is teeming. Failure to understand the imagery and the language of the Qur’an and its stories led the critics to avoid the poem.

In his edition of the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, the critic Quinn gives his opinion of *Al-Aaraaf*, regarding it as an “unintelligible” poem (156). In another edition by Harrison, the editor explains that the poem “is a mere exercise in metrical manipulation, with no higher purpose than the beauty of sound” (VII. Xvii). Even during Poe’s

recitation to the poem in 1845, he and the poem were sharply criticized by the audience in Boston Lyceum. "Poe's manner," Ljungquist points out, "won the scorn of some members of the audience and some of the periodical reviewers...other editors expressed impatience with his position on didactic poetry, the usual fate for recitations on the lyceum circuit" (199). The meeting was then drawn into a serious dispute to the extent that Poe blatantly "insulted his audience by acknowledging he might have been drunk when he read 'Al-Araaf'" (199). Poe, himself, however, realized some of the weak points in *Al-Aaraaf* and admitted that to John Neal in 1829 that: "Al Aaraaf has some good poetry and much extravagance which I have not had time to throw away" (Mabbott 92).

Many readers were totally bewildered by reading the poem, but this does not prevent the poem from being regarded as one of the considerable achievements of Poe's poetic acumen and genius, especially in his early years. Cairns has pointed out that "While 'Al Aaraaf' is not a poem of great intrinsic merit, it is the most important production of a period that is significant in the history of Poe's literary development, and for this reason if for no other it is entitled to consideration" (35). Though the poem has some flaws in the clarity and cohesion, Campbell admits the superior quality and excellence the poem mirrors: "that the poem, in spite of its many defects, is not without real merit will be apparent on a careful examination of it" (173). Yother also admits that Poe's *Al-Aaraaf* demonstrated "Poe's mature poetry" (*Desert of the Blest': Poe's Anti-Representational Invocations of the Near East* 54).

The language of *Al-Aaraaf* is pregnant with hidden meanings. In the first part of the poem, the speaker introduces a mysterious and exotic character whose name is Nesace. The origin of her name is vague. Commenting on the etymology of Nesace,



Mabbott says this name means the “lady of an island” (115). He says also that displaying a spirit dwelling in a star is inspired by Moor’s *Loves of the Angels*. As Mabbott explains, Moore writes a note in his poem related to the dwelling of the spirits in the stars: “a belief that the stars are either spirits or the vehicles of spirits, was common to all the religions and heresies of the East” (15). Mabbott notes that Nesace, the spirit hovering in the sky, is markedly the habitant of the star “Al-Aaraaf” and its ruler (115). However, it is common for the Romantic poets to use some of Arabic words verbatim in their literary works. Poe used several Arabic words verbatim in his writings such as, “Iblis” in *Tamerlane*, “simoom” in *Al-Aaraaf*, “Azrael” in *Ligeia*, “bucksheesh” [bribery] in “Review of Stephen’s Arabia,” and so forth. Hence, this name of Nesace perhaps has roots in Arabic language. The most appropriate word for the name of this female character is “Nasik”, which means “the man who isolates from life to practice a religious and isolated life” (Omar 2204-2205). The female name for “Nasik” is “Nasika” (2204).

Since the female character has an absolute obedience to God and bears willingly the message of God to other worlds, the Arabic name is suitable to her. It implies the behavior and the characteristics associated with this female character in the poem: “She look’d into Infinity — and knelt” (35). Nesace’s kneeling in front of God indicates a kind of worshiping and the performing of a ritualistic ceremony. This aspect of worshiping is actually similar to an act of worshiping done by the Moslems where the aspect of kneeling to God is a major part of the prayer with the repetition the words “Praise be to my great Lord” (Association of Islamic Charitable Projects in North America 26). Poe might be referring to the process of prayer taught in the religion of Islam.

Poe, however, seems to employ religious rituals for poetic meditation. The verse in which the word “Nusuk” [worshiping and piousness] is referred to in the Qur’an is in chapter “The Cattle”: “Say, Verily my prayers, and my worship [Nusuki], and my life, and my death are dedicated unto God, the Lord of all creatures: he hath no companion. This have I been commanded: I am the first Moslem” (Sale 6.162). The verse illustrates a practice of asceticism. The person addressed in the verse is the Prophet Mohammad. Like Mohammad, Nesace enjoys characteristics of a prophet, such as her devoutness and sincerity to the religious message of God. Cairns also says that Nesace is a bearer of a message: “It is the domain of Nesace, a celestial maiden whose mission it is to bear the divine message of beauty from world to world throughout the universe” (37). Yet, Poe’s liberty in framing the poem makes him choose his character to be a female and make her a messenger of beauty rather than a messenger of religious beliefs.

Though Poe gives Nesace qualities of piousness and devoutness, he also refers to the sensuality of her physical appearance: “her cheek was flushing, and her lips apart/ and zone that clung around her gentle waist” (212-213). In a different scene, Poe describes the rising breast of Nesace in the warm pleasant air: “Heaving her white breast to the balmy air/ Like guilty beauty, chasten’d, and more fair —“ (64-65). The reference to the breast in these two lines demonstrates the obvious and close analogy to the Qur’anic verse that also describes the beauty and growth of the heavenly buxom virgins as here in sura seventy eight: “and damsels with swelling breasts, of equal age with themselves, and a full cup” (Sale 33-34). Commenting on the physical reference to Nesace, Campbell confirms Poe’s reference to the sensuality of “houris” in the Qur’an, saying that “it is

possible that he [Poe] had in mind a passage in Sale's 'Preliminary Discourse' (p.70) on the Qur'an describing the sensual enjoyment of Mohammedan paradise" (187).

As discussed, to some critics and many readers, understanding the major themes of *Al-Aaraaf* is problematic. Although the Qur'anic images in Poe's *Al-Aaraaf* are arcane, they can be dissected by understanding perceptively the Qur'anic imagery. The image of comets in *Al-Aaraaf* amplifies Poe's influence by the Qur'anic imagery. This image indicates Poe's esoteric symbolism and the suggestiveness of his allusive language. There are also some Qur'anic images in the poem which are almost inscrutable to the Western critics. Since there is no supported speech or referenced source for the origin of the image of the comets in the poem, the editor Mabbott can not explain the purpose behind relating the angels to the comets in the poem. "The comets here," he states, "are fallen angels, punished by having to carry fire in their hearts. The exact source of the idea in "Al Aaraaf" has not been found" (118). The reference to the comets in the poem is, however, similar to the image of the comets mentioned in the Qur'an. Though Poe diverges from the complete description and story of the comets in the Qur'an, his influence by the idea is still evident. Poe markedly portrays a Qur'anic scene of the fall of the comets in a beautiful poetic image. He says that above the sky there is a barrier which will be removed from these comets: "of the barrier overgone/ by the comets who were cast/ from their pride, and from their throne" (90-92). Poe here deals effectively with the image of the possible attempt of penetrating the sky by humans and spirits as discussed in this verse of the Qur'an: "O ye collective body of genii and men, if ye be able to pass out of the confines of heaven and earth, pass forth: ye shall not pass forth but by absolute power" (Sale 55.33). It is clear to see that this is direct address from God to humans and

other spirits, calling them to cross the heaven. However, the address of God is also to show them that their attempts will be vain. Though Poe's barrier in the poem seems to be destroyed by the comets, falling from the high heaven, the comets in the Qur'an actually will destroy those who dare to cross the limits of the heaven. The comets operate as protectors of the heaven as presented in the Qur'an: "A flame of fire without smoke, and a smoke without flame shall be sent down upon you; and ye shall not be able to defend yourselves therefrom" (55.35). The comets in Poe's poem and in the Qur'an are seen as a part of the divine maneuver in the sky to deter the defiance of humans and other spirits that may happen.

The reference to Christianity and Islam comes together in the poem. Within the interest in the imagery and stories of the Qur'an, a belief of a certain Christian religious group is referred to in *Al-Araaf* though rejected by Poe. In the poem, the belief of considering God as having an anthropoid appearance is condemned by Nesace and this belief also causes the wrath of God. Poe also seems to adopt the doctrine of rejecting any human description to God. Poe writes a note about this belief, saying that: "The Huminitarians held that God was to be understood as having really a human form—" (Hatch and Dunning 18). Poe proceeds to say that the founder of this sect was "Andeus, a Syrian of Mesopotamia, [who] was condemned for the opinion, as heretical... His disciples were called Anthropmorphites. — Vide Du Pin" (18). As he has concluded from *Al-Aaraaf*, Mabbott says that "Neither mortals nor angels can bear the effulgence of the countenance of God... Mahomet himself, Moore remarks, quoting Sale, could not look directly at the angel Gabriel when the latter appeared in his true form" (119). Hence, Poe declares his rejection of the belief of connecting God with a human appearance in a

critical appraisal to the American poet John Gardiner Calkins Brainard (1795-1828), saying that “Bestowing upon Deity a human form is . . . low and most unideal” (Mabbott 118). Here, relating the form of God to a man is connected with the idea of unity of God. Poe clearly knows the belief of unity of God in the religion of Islam. In *The Preliminary Discourse*, Sale observes that the belief of the unity of God is the one of the primary goals of Mohammad’s doctrine, one that he struggled to spread over the community where its people were idolatrous:

His original design of bringing the pagan Arabs to the knowledge of the true God was certainly noble, and highly to be commended; for I cannot possibly subscribe to the assertion of a late learned writer – that he made that nation exchange their idolatry for another religion altogether as bad. Muhammad was no doubt fully satisfied in his conscience of the truth of his grand point, the unity of God, which was what he chiefly attended to. (Wherry 69-70)

This passage clearly shows that the unity of God or the oneness of God is a major part of the religion of Mohammad by which Poe seems to be influenced. As Mabbott has pointed out, Poe “rejects an anthropomorphic idea of God, emphasizes His vastness and power (not merely in minor things like tempests), and His omnipresence” (94). Throughout the poem, the men who believe that God has a form are described as guilty and their claim makes the sky to quiver because of their blasphemy:

Tho’ the beings whom thy Nesace,  
Thy messenger hath known  
Have dream’d for thy infinity  
A model of their own  
Thy will is done, O! God!  
The star hath ridden high. (102-7)

Certainly, Poe has some freedom in dealing with the gender of the characters. Poe absorbed the story of the Prophet Mohammad and the major issue of the unity and

oneness of God and then he reshaped it in a female character who is also seen a messenger of God. One of Nesace's duties is to warn the men of their guilt which is committed because they believe that the form of God resembles that of a man, and this guilt makes the star "totter in the guilt of man" (21).

There is actually a clear similarity between the descriptions in the poem and the Qur'an to the enormity of the guilt of men for believing that God has a form of a man. Like the Qur'an, Poe's *Al-Aaraaf* shows this belief is a hideous guilt and is metaphorically described. Poe uses the Qur'anic expression that reflects the extreme seriousness of claiming that God has the quality of producing a child: "They say, The Merciful hath begotten issue. Now have ye uttered an impious thing: it wanteth little but that on occasion thereof the heavens be rent, and the earth cleave in sunder, and the mountains be overthrown and fall, for that they attribute children unto the Merciful; whereas it becometh not God to beget children" (Sale 19.88-92). Nevertheless, Poe replaces the issue of the belief in God's ability to produce a child with the issue of believing that God has a form of human beings. Like the Qur'anic image of the ripping apart of the sky, the splitting of earth, and removing mountains by forcible power, Poe compares the guilt of man in visualizing God as a form of a human to the shaking and rocking of the stars as if they are about to collapse as presented in the lines "the star hath ridden high" (107) and "lest the star totter in the guilt of man" (150). The issue of imaging God is meticulously observed by Poe in *Eureka*. Unable to perceive the form of God, Poe writes, quoting Baron de Bielfeld's words:

'We know absolutely nothing of the nature or essence of God: — in order to comprehend what he is, we should have to be God ourselves... We should have to be God ourselves!' — With a phrase so startling as this yet ringing

in my ears, I nevertheless venture to demand if this our  
present ignorance of the Deity is an ignorance to which the  
soul is everlastingly condemned. (*Eureka* 28)

It is plain to see that Poe's deep pondering on the formlessness of God's appearance found inspiration in the Qur'an and most likely in this verse "la tudrukhu alabsaar [The sight comprehendeth him not, but he comprehendeth the sight]" (Sale 6.103). Sale also gives another word for translating the Arabic phrase "la tudrukhu" which is "the incomprehensible" (100). Poe's belief of unitarianism is also fostered by his conceptual understanding of Saadi's *Gulisten*. In the introduction of the book, Saadi expresses deep religious devotion, contemplating the impossibility of imaging God: "Oh thou who are thou above all imaginations, conjectures, opinions, ideas/ above anything people have said or we have heard/ or read," (5). Saadi's supplication thus inspired Poe's muse of inconceivability of God.

More significantly, Poe implicitly refers to the Prophet Mohammad in *Al-Aaraaf*. This reference is simply understood because the unrecognized shepherd in the poem draws the attention of the Moslem reader. At the start of part two, Poe mysteriously refers to the shepherd:

High on a mountain of enamell'd head —  
Such as the drowsy shepherd on his bed  
Of giant pasturage lying at his ease,  
Raising his heavy eyelid, starts and sees,  
With many a mutter'd "hope to be forgiven."  
(159-163)

In this passage, there are four points that prove that the shepherd here is the Prophet Mohammad. The first point is the word shepherd because the prophet Mohammad was known as a shepherd in his early adulthood. According to Public Broadcasting Service (PBS): "When a young boy, Muhammad worked as a shepherd to help pay his keep (his

uncle was of modest means)” (par.3). The second point is that the high mountain in the poem where the shepherd dwells impliedly refers to the place where Mohammad received the verses of the Qur’an by the angel Gabriel. This place is known as “hira” or “the cave in Mount Hira” (Wherry 70). The mountain actually has some sacredness as described in the poem in having enameled upper part; that is, the word enamel is an opaque and semi-transparent glassy substance used for ornamentation and protective coating. So, the description of this place as being decorated and ornamented is made to show the feature of holiness and veneration that the place enjoys. After this passage, the speaker in the poem says that a ray comes from the moon which is seen from the mountain: “what time the moon is quadrated in Heaven” (164). The connection between the mountain and the moon raises another story from the Qur’an which emphasizes the point that the shepherd in the poem is the prophet Mohammad. In the first verse of chapter fifty-four named “The Moon”, God says, “The hour of judgment approacheth; and the moon hath been split in sunder” (Sale 54.1). More importantly, Sale comments on the verse related to the splitting moon, saying that:

This passage is expounded two different ways. Some imagine the words refer to a famous miracle supposed to have been performed by Mohammed; for it is said that, on the infidels demanding a sign of him, the moon appeared cloven in two, one part vanishing, and the other remaining; and Ebn Masúd affirmed that he saw Mount Harâ interpose between the two sections. Others think the present tense is here used in the prophetic style for the future, and that the passage should be rendered, The moon shall be split in sunder: for this, they say, is to happen at the resurrection. The former opinion is supported by reading, according to some copies, wakad inshakka lkamaro, i.e., since the moon hath already been split in sunder; the splitting of the moon being reckoned by some to be one of the previous signs of the last day. (394)



Since the moon is divided in two parts and only one part is left with light, Poe might describe only the luminous part which probably looked “quadrated” in the sky and “nurstled the young mountain in its lair” (173). The image of the splitting moon is also articulated through Poe’s *Israfel*: “Tottering above/ in her highest noon/ the enamoured moon” (6-8).

The third and fourth points that support the claim of reference to the prophet Mohammad is that the lethargic state that the shepherd feels in his bed: “such as the drowsy shepherd in his bed” (160). The drowsiness and the bed connected with the shepherd is a clear reference to the trance-like state of Mohammad after he received the verses of the Qur’an from the angel Gabriel in the high mountain. When he returned from hira, receiving some of the verses of the Qur’an, Mohammad was in a state of an extreme apprehension, and he asked to be cloaked heavily. Then, Gabriel asked him to get up and pray for God at night. In sura named “Wrapped up,” God says, “O Thou wrapped up, arise to prayer, and continue therein during the night, except a small part; that is to say, during one half thereof: or do thou lessen the same a little or add thereto. And repeat the Qur’an with a distinct and sonorous voice” (Sale 73.1-4). To further explain this verse, Sale cites from the *mufasssir* [expert in exegesis] who is Al Zamakh. The mufasssir, Sale translates, shows more clearly the state of Mohammad after he received the verses of the Qur’an: “When this revelation was brought to Mohammed, he was wrapped up in his garments, being affrighted at the appearance of Gabriel; or, as some say, he lay sleeping unconcernedly, or, according to others, praying, wrapped up in one part of a large mantle or rug, with the other part of which Ayesha had covered herself to sleep” (430). The quivering state of Mohammad with his sleeping calmly in his “bed” are all employed by

Poe imaginatively and poetically to give his character (the shepherd) more sacredness throughout a religious ritual the shepherd makes during the night: “with a many muttered ‘hope to be forgiven’” (163). To further cement the connection, Mabbott says that “the pious shepherd prays whenever he awakes from sleep” (120).

Most of the events that take place in the poem seem nocturnal. The immediate presence of the moon after the shepherd’s supplication reinforces the connection between the night and the prayer. The most proper prayer that God recommends Mohammad to do after he was frightened is the night prayer: “for we will lay on thee a weighty word. Verily the rising by night is more efficacious for steadfast continuance in devotion, and more conducive to decent pronunciation” (Sale 73.5-6). Sale refers to these verses to a note that clarifies the importance of the night in the religious worship and observance: “For the nighttime is most proper for meditation and prayer, and also for reading God’s word distinctly and with attention, by reason of the absence of every noise and object which may distract the mind” (431). As Mabbott observes, Poe perhaps takes the idea of the worshiping man from Moore’s *Lalla Rookh*. In the poem, Moore describes a boy praying in a Turkish way (120), prostrating on grass, and having an aromatic smell:

The boy had started from his bed  
Of flowers, where he had lain his head,  
And down upon the fragrant sod  
Kneels. (149)

The Islamic prayer done by the boy in Moore’s poem notably inspired Poe to depict the prayer of the shepherd in his bed and also the kneeling of Nesace to God where the kneeling and prostrating are major parts in the prayer for the Moslem.

By depicting the abstract beauty of Nesace and other beings in the poem, Poe distinguishes between beauty, passion, and truth. The poem is the contemplation of

beauty, and truth or “Knowledge” is avoided in the poem. The beings in the poem are afraid to reach this knowledge. Poe makes it clear in “The Poetic Principle” that the poetry is void of the characteristic of the truth. “It has been my purpose to suggest that,” Poe writes, “while this Principle itself is, strictly and simply, the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty, the manifestation of the Principle is always found in an elevating excitement of the Soul, quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart — or of that Truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason.” (6). In another essay, Poe intensifies his theory of separating truth from poetry, writing that “A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having, for its immediate object, pleasure, not truth;” (*Poems* 28). Therefore, some critics regard Poe’s influence by the Orient and the Islamic doctrine only for their striking, unusual, and exotic elements. As Montgomery explains, Poe “primarily employs Oriental images for their exoticism” (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse” 4). Betsy Erkkila also asserts that Poe’s influence by the Near Orient accompanied by his awareness of the otherness of that world: “Poe was not so much interested in the Qur’an or the religious beliefs of the Arabs as he was in ‘the Arabians’ as figures of romantic apartness and otherworldliness” (48).

It is obvious in *Al-Aaraaf* that Nesace is a personification of beauty. She represents the quest for finding the perfection of attractiveness and beauty. As Yother explains, this “elusiveness of the ideal world of abstract and utopian beauty for which the poem expresses a powerful yearning” (“Desert of the Blest’: Poe’s Anti-Representational Invocations of the Near East” 56). The reader of the poem can feel the extreme pleasure and delight in the beauty of the celestial worlds in which Nesace exists and also in the

beauty of her exotic flowers of her bed and her indescribable flushing cheeks. By concentrating on divine beauty rather than earthly beauty, Montgomery thinks that this kind of beauty is made for the liberation from the monotonous beauty of the native land and the traditional poetry as well. “Discovering spiritual beauty beyond the terrestrial sphere,” Montgomery writes, “the speaker also transcends the limits of inherited cultural traditions and aesthetic values, luxuriating in the fascinating Otherness of *Al Aaraaf*, a name derived, of course, from the key text of Islamic spirituality” (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 *Poems* and the Renewal of American Verse” 8). This poem is not only an urgent call for change, but also there is an appreciation for the Orient where “Poe eulogizes the Orient in ‘Al Aaraaf,’ and in so doing he makes a powerful cultural statement” (9). By the time he was writing, Poe remained anti-traditionalist poet, believing art should be free from politics. Politics and the differences in religions should not isolate people from communicating about each other’s in a way that enriches the poetic imagination and enables the work of the poet to live forever. “Passionate in his defense of creative freedom,” Montgomery observes, “Poe insists that no affiliations, political or cultural, can supersede the imagination, which alone can secure literary immortality” (9). Like Montgomery, Yother writes that the Orient is used by Poe as providing a range and diverse sources for representing new ideas and styles. “Because *Al-Aaraaf* is so central to understanding Poe’s engagement with the Near East,” Yother points out, “it is worthwhile to consider carefully the eclectic ways in which the Near East appears in the poem” (“Desert of the Blest’: Poe’s Anti-Representational Invocations of the Near East” 55-56). In a word, *Al-Aaraaf* is an embrace of a culture that reveres beauty and art. This culture unequivocally enriched Romantic poetry as a whole.

As for the contrast between truth and poetry, Poe is plainly inspired by the idea of differentiating poetry from truth in the Qur'an. In sura named "The Poets," God reproaches the poets and also those who are affected by their words: "And those who err follow the steps of the poets: dost thou not see that they rove as bereft of their senses through every valley; and that they say that which they do not? except those who believe, and do good works, and remember God frequently" (Sale 26.224-27). In a note that shows a clear interpretation to this verse, Sale explains the behavior of the poets, saying that "their compositions being as wild as the actions of a distracted man: for most of the ancient poetry was full of vain imaginations; as fabulous stories and descriptions, love verses, flattery, excessive commendations of their patrons, and as excessive reproaches of their enemies, incitements to vicious actions, vainglorious vauntings, and the like" (284). Accordingly, the poetry that does not speak the truth is chastised in the Qur'an. The Qur'an actually came as a revolutionary language that defied the language of the poetry of the pre-Islamic period, a period regarded as one of the golden ages of the power and prosperity of poetry, eloquence, and rhetoric in the Arab world. The two sides that are divided in the Qur'an are the side of poetry, which is the pre-Islamic poetry, as a representative of untruth and the side of the Qur'an, a representative of the truth. Thus, Poe must have had an awareness of the importance of the dichotomy between poetry and the religious text discussed in the Qur'an. He employs the Quran and its language for imaginative and poetic purposes.

Like the Qur'an, *Al-Aaraaf* demonstrates the precision of the creation of the universe. In the last part of the poem, the speaker seems to think thoughtfully about the sophistication of the creation of the star "Al-Aaraaf." This is revealed by the reference to

the word “Daedalion.” Mabbott notes that “‘Daedalion’ is a proper noun formed from the singular neuter form of the adjective derived from Daedalus, the ‘cunning’ artificer of wings, who had a descriptive name” (126). Like Daedalus who is a skilled maker and designer of a complicated structure, “The Messenger Star, Al Aaraaf,” Mabbott writes, “was a carefully designed artifact of the Supreme Artist, God” (126). Because of this, the reference to “Daedalion” is clearly made to emphasize the mastery of the creation of the heavens, the universe, stars, and earth by God. Poe’s interest in the accuracy of the creation of the universe might be triggered from the verse of the Qur’an, which says, “Lift up thine eyes again to heaven, and look whether thou seest any flaw: then take two other views; and thy sight shall return unto thee dull and fatigued” (Sale 67.5-6).

Moreover, Poe sees a prophetic importance in the appearance of the star, which was discovered by Tycho Brahe. Poe often refers to prophecies in his poetry and essays. Being interested in prophetic references and portents, Poe, using the text of 1829, changed the name of the star from Al-Aaraaf to “Tophet-Nour,” while he was reading the poem in front of the public in Boston in 1845 (Mabbott 127). The phrase “Tophet-Nour” conspicuously has Semitic roots. It is either a mixture of Hebrew and Arabic words, which in Hebrew means “light of Hell” or “burning light” (127). In Arabic, it, however, means “extinction of light” because the term “Tophet” has an Arabic root. “Tophet” might come from the noun “Intipha” which means in Arabic, according to the Qamoos Almaani dictionary, the reduction in the intensity of light or radiation (“Intipha”). Mabbott says that Tycho and other experts in celestial bodies related the appearance of this star to a sign of apocalyptic events: “Tycho, like almost all the old astronomers, was

also an astrologer, and regarded it as of bad omen. Some of his contemporaries thought it a warning of the end of the world” (96).

There are several lines in *Al-Aaraaf* that are purely or relatively analogous to the verses of the Qur'an. Early in the poem, there is a similarity between Poe's lines and the Qur'anic lines regarding the termination of the earthly world: “O! NOTHING earthly save the ray/ [thrown back from flowers] of Beauty's eye” (1-2). There are many verses in the Qur'an that discuss the transience of any living objects on this earth, but the most notable verse that parallels Poe's line about the termination is : “Every creature which liveth on the earth is subject to decay: but the glorious and honourable countenance of thy Lord shall remain forever” (Sale 55.26-27). Poe begins his poem as a seer who anticipates the withering of the flower—symbolically the end of the world. The rays of the flowers in the poem are a part of the objects that are inevitably brought to an end. The flower in the poem serves as a symbol of shortness of life and its withering stands for inevitable death. By emphasizing the temporariness of life, Poe expresses his surprise that “nothing,” as in “every creature” whether a human, animal or plant has the ability to guard the flower against unavoidable withering—death. It is also nothing in this world can keep “the thrill of melody in woodland rill” (6) alive.

Poe in *Al-Aaraaf* gives an aesthetic value to the vastness of space. He says that the stars in space reflect strong attraction to and decoration for the physical universe: “Adorning then the dwellings of the sky” (178). The image of coloration and ornamentation of the sky given by the stars is markedly Qur'anic. Poe takes the word “adorn” verbatim from the Qur'an: “Moreover we have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps, and have appointed them to be darted at the devils, for whom we have prepared

the torment of burning fire” (Sale 67.5). After painting and arraying the sky in the stars, Poe adds more beautification to the sphere by making use of the second part of the Qur’anic verse: “And rays from God shot down that meteor chain/ And hallow’d all the beauty twice again” (183-184). The lights that stream from God in Poe’s poem clearly parallel the lamps mentioned in the Qur’an. The lamps referred to in the Qur’an mean the planets where parts from them get torn and thrown with fire towards the devils who attempt to hear the news of the heavens. Poe uses this image to duplicate the beauty of space and add more holiness to the sky. Here, Poe treats the form of God as a light: “and rays from God shot down that meteor chain” (183). In the Qur’an, God is described as the light of the universe: “God is the light of heaven and earth: the similitude of his light is as a niche in a wall, wherein a lamp is placed, and the lamp enclosed in a case of glass; the glass appears as it were a shining star” (Sale 24.35). Sale points out that God’s light in this verse is used metaphorically: “The commentators explain this allegory, and every particular of it, with great subtlety; interpreting the light here described to be the light revealed in the Korân, or God’s enlightening grace in the heart of man; and in divers other manners” (269). Thus, the metaphorical image of God’s light in the Qur’an must have added to Poe’s poetic repertoire attractive features to depict the sky in an aesthetically pleasing appearance.

Poe was also familiar with the image of adorning the universe in his reading to Saadi’s *Gulistan*. Heading to Mecca for pilgrimage, Saadi makes supplication to God to provide him and sustain him to endure his religious journey and to purify his soul by rejecting the worldly delights and showing meek obedience to Him: “O God, who hast adorned the universe, / be bountiful to thy old slave.”/ Saadi take the road to the Ka’bah



of submission” (87). In *Al-Aaraaf*, the word “adorn” comes to describe how beauty decorates the distant space. Then, the scene immediately shifts to Nesace who moves quickly to a “temporary rest” in the “desert of the blest” (18-19).

Throughout the poem, Poe refers to a desert made holy and consecrated: “A garden spot in desert of the blest” (19). The beatitude and blessedness of the fertile spot in the desert mentioned in the poem refers to three possible places in the Middle East: Sinai, Jerusalem, or Arabia. Jerusalem is the center of the Night Journey of Mohammad to Heaven and also the center of other Abrahamic religions which are Christianity and Judaism. In the Qur’an, Jerusalem is described as a blessed place: “the circuit of which we have blessed” (Sale 17.1). If the reader observes the poem deeply, the reference to Jerusalem will be clearer. After referring to it at the beginning of the poem, Poe later makes another reference to Jerusalem by referring to it as a rounded vault forming the roof of the structure: “by a dome, by linked light from Heaven let down, / Sat gently on these columns as a crown —A window of one circular diamond, there” (79). Poe here conspicuously refers to the Dome of the Rock in Palestine which is the center of the three religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Poe solemnly describes the sacred dome as a palace covered with precious stones and ornamental headdress. Concerning Arabia, it is obviously known as the birthplace of Islam and it is described as, though arid, a blessed region by the prophet Abraham in the Qur’an: “O Lord, I have caused some of my offspring to settle in an unfruitful valley, near the holy house” (Sale 14.37). Sinai is also described as a sacred place in the Qur’an. When the Prophet Moses was about to speak to God, he was ordered to keep his shoes away from the blessed valley where he would converse with God: “verily I am thy Lord: wherefore put off thy shoes; for thou art in the

sacred valley Towa” (20.12). Hence, the three blessed places: Jerusalem, Sinai, and Arabia signify Poe’s influence by the Eastern books, the Bible, and the Qur’an.

In the second passage of the first part of the poem, Poe is seemingly inspired by the Night Journey of Mohammad in presenting the soul of Nesace and her movement with astonishing agility in the dark space where she moves unboundedly:

Away – away – mid seas of rays that roll  
Empyrean splendor o’er the unchained soul–  
The soul that scarce [the billows are so dense]  
Can struggle to its destined eminence –  
To distant spheres, from time to time, she rode.  
(20-24)

Poe says here that Nesace’s place is a considerable distance from the earthly world. Her soul is also heading further in the deep space. Looking carefully at the verse of the Qur’an that presents the Night Journey of Mohammad, the similarity of the scene between Poe’s Nesace and the Night Journey becomes more prominent: “Praise be unto him who transported his servant by night, from the sacred temple of Mecca to the farther temple of Jerusalem, the circuit of which we have blessed, that we might show some of our signs; for God is he who heareth, and seeth” (Sale 17.1). Sale explains how Mohammad was taken from earth to Heaven: “From whence he was carried through the seven heavens to the presence of God, and brought back again to Mecca the same night” (208). Sale also describes the Night Journey according to the Qur’an and the books of exegesis and commentators which show differences between the Night Journey and the mechanism by which Mohammad ascended to Heaven while still alive. “It is a dispute among the Mohammedan divines,” Sale writes, “whether their prophets night-journey was really performed by him corporally, or whether it was only a dream or vision” (208).

The important point that might have inspired Poe to frame the character of Nesace as a soul is that some of the interpreters, Sale explains, assume that Mohammad ascended to Heaven as a spirit: “Others suppose he was carried bodily to Jerusalem, but no farther; and that he ascended thence to heaven in spirit only” (qtd. in Sale 208). In *The Preliminary Discourse*, the similarity between the two nocturnal journeys becomes easier to perceive. “For this institution,” Sale has pointed out, “he pretended to have received the divine command from the throne of God himself, when he took his night-journey to heaven” (Wherry 143). The peremptory order sent from God to Mohammad is similar to the command of God to Nesace in the poem also seen as a messenger of God: “Tho’ the beings whom thy Nesace, / thy messenger hath known” (102-103). The order of God to Mohammad is the divine message to worship him and acknowledge his oneness, but the order Nesace receives in the poem is a message of divine beauty. As Mohammad, Nesace is also familiar with Hell and Paradise where her realm lies in the middle: “apart from Heaven’s Eternity— and yet how far from Hell” (332). The visual image of seeing the spirits, maidens, beings, and seraphs by Nesace corresponds to the scene of the souls seen by Mohammad as Sale states: “In his return from the upper heavens in his pretended night journey, he saw there the souls of those who were destined to Paradise on the right-hand of Adam and of those who were condemned to hell on his left” (208).

In *Re(orient)ing America : the Imagined Middle East in the Early Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Montgomery reinforces Poe’s influence by the Night Journey of Mohammad. He observes Poe’s *Metzengerstein*, saying that “describing Metzengerstein’s final ride, Poe cleverly reverses the spiritual import of Mohammad’s heavenly odyssey. Whereas

the prophet's journey ends in enlightenment and establishes an enduring spiritual legacy, Metzengerstein's wild ride merely results in death" (91).

Like *Israfel*, *Al-Aaraaf* clearly refers to the beautiful virgin companions of the faithful in the Moslem Paradise. The description of the houri in the Qur'an is expressed in Poe's poem in an alternative way but with the same idea and meaning in one verse. Poe likens Nesace to a pearl, saying that she is "like woman's hair 'mid pearls, until, afar" (33). Similarly, in the Qur'an, the houris are described as pearls: "Having complexions like rubies and pearls" (Sale 55.58). But in the other verse, Poe exactly uses the same words to describe houris as are used originally in the Qur'an: "And there shall accompany them fair damsels having large black eyes; resembling pearls hidden in their shells" (56.22-23). Poe's phrase "mid pearls" is highly analogous to the Qur'anic phrase as in "pearls hidden in their shells" (23). Poe often refers to the bed and seat of Nesace in the poem as in: "All hurriedly she knelt upon a bed/ of flowers: of lilies such as rear the head" (42-43). He then gives the bed of the maiden more sacred qualities and describes it as a holy place for its association with divinity: "up rose the maiden from her shrine of flowers" (156). The image of the reclining seat is frequently mentioned in the Qur'an, especially to the verses that describe the situation of the inhabitants of Paradise who are accompanied with houris as their wives. For instance, they are "leaning on couches disposed in order: and we will espouse them unto virgins having large black eyes" (Sale 52.20). The repeated reference to the bed in Poe's poem emphasizes Poe's inspiration in the Qur'anic visual depiction of the ineffable natural beauty in Paradise where the aesthetic qualities of the description obviously fascinated Poe.

Heaven, Poe says, is the place of revealing secrets: “Till secrecy shall knowledge be/ in the environs of Heaven” (116-117). The speaker or Poe regards himself as a human who is also going to disclose his hidden works: “Yet thine is my resplendency, so given/ To bear my secrets thro’ the upper Heaven” (141-142). Poe does not even exclude the non-human beings from revealing the secret things that they hide inside. He also addresses Nesace, as an angel, prophet, or maiden to disclose her secrets, which will be known in Heaven: “Divulge the secrets of thy embassy/ to the proud orbs that twinkle — and so be” (147). Heaven, as a place of disclosing secrets, is frequently described in the Qur’an: “the day whereon all secret thoughts and actions shall be examined into;” (Sale 86.9). Every single thing that humans do on earth whether publically or secretly will be revealed in minute details in Heaven and in front of God: “On that day ye shall be presented before the judgment-seat of God; and none of your secret actions shall be hidden” (69.18). Hence, being aware of Heaven as the region of disclosure of secrets, Poe uses the Qur’anic image to show an embellished poetic image in letting Nesace reveal her hidden gorgeous qualities of abstract beauty which are visible to the celestial bodies that shine in the sky.

On the symbolic level, Poe invokes the image of the Qur’anic angels that carry God’s throne. He presents Nesace in the poem as an attendant to her throne: “Ascend thy empire and so be/ A partner of thy throne” (112-113). In the Qur’an, the throne of God is presented as a throne carried by eight angels: “and the angels shall be on the sides thereof; and eight shall bear the throne of thy Lord above them, on that day” (Sale 69.18). Poe thematizes the Qur’anic prophet, damsel, and angel to compose the character Nesace, who is filled with sacredness and solemnity that satisfy the poetic pleasure that the poet

himself eagerly seeks. Interestingly, the relation between the throne of God and Gabriel (the angel) is presented in the Qur'an where Gabriel is described as a messenger: "these are the words of an honourable messenger, endued with strength, of established dignity in the sight of the possessor of the throne" (81.19-20). The closeness of the angel Gabriel to the throne of God and the duty he has as a messenger are qualities given to Nesace who is an obedient messenger and also called by the speaker to be in a short distance to her throne.

Being inspired by the apocalyptic images and eschatological references of the Qur'an, Poe describes the earthly world as a world completely void. He gives an image of utter catastrophe to the earth that will inevitably be brought to an end: "Ours is a world of words: Quiet we call/ 'Silence' – which is the merest word of all –" (127). Poe here sees visions of the future of this world. Like an apocalyptic and prophetic poet, Poe associates the deep and absolute silence with the predictable tribulations of the end of the world that he believes will be fulfilled. In this way, Poe also addresses the reader by using the possessive pronoun "ours," which includes the speaker and also the reader who are human beings belonging to this earth. Poe communicates to the reader the intensity of the music of the spheres and then brings him to the absolute dead silence and utter tranquility of the earth.

The verses that deal with images of silence in the Qur'an are abundant. The most analogous image in the Qur'an to Poe's image of silence is clear in this verse of the sura Al-Araf: "How many cities have we destroyed: which our vengeance overtook by night, or while they were reposing themselves at noon-day!" (Sale 7.4). The message here is directed to human beings to understand the destiny of previous generations as a proof of

the eventual extinction of all creatures on this earth. In presenting the apocalyptic image of the poem, Poe uses emphatic terms similar to those in the Qur'an as in "The eternal voice of God is passing by" and "thy will is done, O! God!" (106). The poetic expression here is made by the Qur'anic expression of the verse that shows the power of God's will: "The sentence of God will surely come to be executed; wherefore do not hasten it. Praise be unto him! and far be that from him which they associate with him!" (Sale 16.1-2).

Returning to the imagery of the Qur'an, the most fascinating image that shows the closeness between Poe's line and the Qur'anic verse is the expression that deals with the redness of the sky compared to the redness of the rose. Poe says, "And the red winds are withering in the sky!" (132). The tacit plant intended here is clearly a rose, which becomes dry and shriveled. Poe seems to use a metaphorical image from the Qur'an: "And when the heaven shall be rent in sunder, and shall become red as a rose, and shall melt like ointment" (Sale 55.37). Sale comments on this verse that discusses the redness of the sky, writing that the sky "shall appear like red leather; according to a different signification of the original word" (398). The quality of redness to the winds in Poe's poem and the redness of the sky in the Qur'an are both symbolically likened to roses. Like *Al-Aaraaf*, Poe's *Israfel* also reflects the image of the red light in the sky.

Describing the moon that listens to Israfel's song, the speaker says that the face of the moon becomes red and rosy: "The enamoured moon/ Blushes with love" (8-9). It is clear to notice that the extended metaphor is expressed to show the efficacy of Israfel's sound or "song" which fills the moon with love, ecstasy, and delight. Poe then relates the redness of the moon to the red lightening that ceased and stopped in the sky: "While to listen, the red Levin/ pauses in heaven" (10-11). The intensity of the red color in the sky

is an image described in the Qur'an to show an apocalyptic event that will happen at the end of the world. Although he is interested in the Bible as a source of prophecies and apocalypse in his writings, Poe turned to use the Qur'anic treatment for the prophetic events in the universe at the final destruction of the world.

In addition, Poe, inspired by the Qur'an, seems to ponder deeply on the nature of the stars. He realizes that his assumptions may not be real. In *Eureka*, he clearly realizes the untruth of poetry since he calls it a prose poem. He claims also that some facts can be reached by guesses as Newton did in his theories so that estimation and supposition are the ways by which Poe presents his hypotheses in relation to the cosmos. "It seems to me," Poe writes, "that, in aiming at this latter effect, and, through it, at the consequences — the conclusions — the suggestions — the speculations — or, if nothing better offer itself, the mere guesses which may result from it — we require something like a mental gyration on the heel" (9). Like *Al-Aaraaf*, Poe's *Eureka* is influenced by Qur'anic concepts, especially the cosmological ones. Rachman also remarks that halfway location of "Al-Aaraaf" has influence on *Eureka*: "In terms of cosmology, these medial places would return in *Eureka* (and in other moments in his work), as a central area of consideration in his theory of the generation and fate of the universe" (1).

In *Al-Aaraaf*, for instance, Poe hypothetically shows the way stars operate: "Of molten stars their pavement, such as fall /Thro' the ebon air, besilvering the pall/ Of their own dissolution, while they die" (167-177). Poe here compares the process of creation of the stars to the life of humans which has beginning, middle (prosperous luminous age), and end. Poe's postulations clearly has an inspiration from the Qur'an. Poe shows exactly the same image of disappearing and falling of the stars in the Qur'an: "When the sun



shall be folded up; and when the stars shall fall” (Sale 81.1-2). In another verse, the star has the quality of fading out and vanishing: “When the stars, therefore, shall be put out” (77.8-10). Noticing the similarity between the falling, dissolving, and dying of the stars and collapsing and disappearing of the stars in the Qur’an, in chapter seventy-seven of the Qu’ran, God says, “Verily I swear by the stars which are retrograde, which move swiftly, and which hide themselves” (8). The image of the stars, which are kept out of sight, is clear to see in this verse. Sale also comments on this verse, explaining: “Some understand hereby the stars in general, but the more exact commentators, five of the planets, viz., the two which accompany the sun, and the three superior planets; which have both a retrograde and a direct motion, and hide themselves in the rays of the sun, or when they set” (442). Alsaadi writes that it has recently been proved by science that the stars undergo a period of gradual phases which they “exist as a result of birth, grow in youthfulness, and then reach the period of aging and extinction” (par. 3). He analyzes also the Arabic word for the disappearing stars that is used in the Qur’an. This word is “Tamis” [extinguishing light] (Ibn Mandoor 2703). In "Dissolution of Star Clusters in Galaxies," Wielen, R., in 1988, points out that “due to internal or external dynamical effects, star clusters often dissolve during a period shorter than the Hubble time” (393). Thus, Poe seems to be the first one who raises the theory of dissolution of the stars in his poem and is unarguably indebted to the inspiration in the Qur’an.

Besides the imagery and stories of the Qur’an, Poe also borrows from Saadi’s *Gulisten*. He refers to the Persian poet: “With Persian Saadi in his Gulistan” (386). “Sādi, the bard of Shiraz,” Mabbott writes, “a leading poet of Persia, was born about A. D. 1184 and is said to have lived to be 110 years old. Even if these were lunar years, he lived over

a century. He was noted for piety, elegance, and wit, and wrote voluminously, his best-known work being the *Gulistan*, or ‘Rose Garden’” (126). Saadi lived during the twelfth century whose poetry, especially *Gulisten* was influential in Europe and was translated into different European languages. *Gulisten* actually contains both poetry and prose. It has short stories diffused with lines of poetry and characterized by nature imagery, narration of events, and aphoristic and wise expressions. The most remarkable images that Poe borrowed from Saadi’s *Gulisten* are those which are associated with nature imagery: the images of flowers, bee, rose, pearl, shell, and so on.

Both Saadi’s *Gulisten* and Poe’s *Al-Aaraaf* show many affinities. Like Saadi, Poe in *Al-Aaraaf* seems fond of trees and loving flowers. In *The Portrayal of Al-Aaraaf and its Environs in Edgar Allan Poe’s “Al-Aaraaf,”* Septianhardini observes that “Nesace, on the earth, delivers her prayer to God together with the seven earthly flowers. The flowers, which offer up her prayer to God, are Sephalica, Gemmy flower, Nyctanthes, Cyltia, Valisnerian Lotus, Zante, and Nelumbo” (111). Thus, Poe’s fondness for flowers is inspired by Saadi’s *Gulisten*. A part of this influence, however, is intended for symbolic purposes. Poe initiates the poem with a clear influence by the image of the flowers of Saadi: “O! NOTHING earthly save the ray/ [thrown back from flowers] of Beauty’s eye” (87). Later, Poe refers again to the dying flower of earth: “And that aspiring flower that sprang on Earth – / And died, ere scarce exalted into birth” (69-70). Poe here refers to the flower as a symbol of the brevity of life. He seems distressed by the inability of humans to rescue the rays that come from the bright and scented flower. In *Gulisten*, Saadi uses the earthly flower as a representation of life which undergoes a period of youthfulness, prosperity, and then decaying: “A flower is sometimes blooming and sometimes

withering/ a tree at times nude and at times clothed” (72). However, Saadi distinguishes between the flower of earth and his flower that seems heavenly and otherworldly: “A flower endures but five or six days/ but this rose-garden is always delightful” (12). Like Saadi, Poe perhaps refers to the contrast between the worldly flower and heavenly flower by presenting Nesace in an extraordinary environment covered by abundance of flowers where there is no reference to decaying associated with the exotic flowers: “All hurriedly she knelt upon a bed/ of flowers: of lilies such as rear the head” (42-43). The image of the bed of flowers in Poe’s line seems inspired by Saadi’s image. Spending time with one of his companions, Saadi says that the wind “spread[s] out a bed of all kinds of flowers” (12). Yet, both Poe and Saadi share the feeling of deep stress and sorrow for the temporariness of the earthly flowers, expressing that in an image that evokes the feelings of the reader. The feature that differentiates the earthly flower from the heavenly one is decay and death whereas the heavenly flower enjoys immortality. After portraying the image of the flower, Poe uses another image that indicates the expiration of age and youth: “Joy’s voice so peacefully departed/ that like the murmur in the shell” (8-9). Poe depicts how youth expires as the running out of water from the shell. This image is likely inspired by Saadi’s image of velocity of running out of water from a small stream: “Seek not a youth’s hilarity in an old man/ for the water gone from the brook returns no more” (150). Here, Poe’s “Joy’s voice” matches Saadi’s “a youth’s hilarity” which both sonorously refer to a temporary great amusement compared to the flow of water till it comes to an end.

Allegorically, in seeing Necase as a female human being, Poe’s use of extravagance in clothing his character with flowers, pearls, or gold might indicate Saadi’s

misogynistic point of view towards women in depicting them as being inherently obsessed in ornaments, avarice, ambition, and rivalry:

A nice face and a gown of gold brocade,  
Essence of roses fragrant aloes, paint, perfume and  
Lust:  
All these are ornaments of women. (149)

The “nice face” in Saadi’s passage parallels Poe’s abstract beauty of Nesace. The fragrance of flowers and perfume is similar to the abundant use of flowers in Poe’s poem as in “Nyctanthes too, as sacred as the light/ she fears to perfume, perfuming the night –” (66-67). The image of lust about woman in Saadi’s passage is also mentioned in Poe’s poem as in: “her cheek was flushing, and her lips apart; / and zone that clung around her gentle waist” (212-213). By contrast, Poe’s excessive use of gemmy flowers, jewelry, and other ornamental elements to weave his female character is made to elevate woman’s status. Poe rectifies and recreates Saadi’s image of the excessive ornamentation in order to mold his female character with ornate qualities of her physical attraction, outstanding beauty, and distinctive appearance.

The other remarkable image of nature in Saadi’s *Gulisten* that inspired Poe is the image of dew, the bulbul (nightingale), and the bee, all of which are intertwined in the poem. Saadi is submerged in his poem. He gives a vivid description of the natural surroundings that encircle him. He depicts the image of the nightingales as if it is a realistic portrayal of their singing in the roses full of nectar: “The bulbuls were singing on the pulpits of branches / Upon the roses pearls of dew had fallen/ Resembling perspiration on an angry sweetheart’s cheek” (11). Besides the dew, Saadi refers symbolically to the suffering of love by depicting the image of the sting of the bee. In one of his stories about the tragedy and legend of Layla and Majnun which took place in

Arabia around the sixth century and was popular in Persia in twelfth century. Majnun means insane in Arabic and it is a nickname that the Arab poet Qais (645 A.D.-688 A.D.) was given because of his infatuation for his beloved Layla who married another man. Her marriage to another man caused Qais to wander in the desert insane, warbling verses of suffering and grief about his love for her before he died as a result. This legend was written and reshaped into Persian by the poet Nizami Ganjavi (1141- 1209) (Encyclopedia Iranica par.1). Qais's legend was translated into English by Isaac D'Israeli in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (par.15). The legend might have influenced Poe, especially in his treatment of the image of the raven in his masterpiece *The Raven*.

However, while narrating briefly Majnun's story, Saadi says, conveying Majnun's speech: "it is useless to speak of bees to one/ who never in his life felt their sting" (139-140). Poe seems to present the image of the dew and bee of Saadi's poem to reshape it differently and also to show the ritualistic relationship between the flower and bee: "It still remaineth torturing the bee with madness, and unwonted reverie – "(58-59). Instead of regarding the bee as a torturer, Poe differs from Majnun and makes the flower the torturer which inflicts severe pain to the bee by its unusual nectar that made the bee feel pain and ecstasy concurrently. Poe also says, "All other loveliness: its honied dew/ [The fabled nectar that the heathen knew]/deliriously sweet, was dropp'd from Heaven" (52-54). The honey imagery is also borrowed from the Qur'an. The Qur'anic image of the heavenly honey is inculcated in Poe's mind. Poe, investing the religious ecstasy and elation for the poetic euphoric feeling, connects the dew with the honey of the nectar secreted from flower, using a Qur'anic image about the heavenly honey in Moslem paradise. The description of the Qur'anic paradise in Sale's translation is particularly

noticeable: “The description of paradise, which is promised unto the pious: therein are rivers of incorruptible water; and rivers of milk, the taste whereof changeth not; and rivers of wine, pleasant unto those who drink; and rivers of clarified honey” (Sale 47.15). The absolute purity of the unimaginable honey in the Qur’anic Paradise appears to correspond to the honeyed dew of Poe’s flower that makes its drinker live in a state of wild excitement, delirium, and ecstasy.

The hyacinth is also a flower referred to in Saadi’s *Gulisten*, which ostensibly reinforced Poe’s use of flowers imagery in *Al-Aaraaf*. Poe describes these kinds of flowers as a group of beautiful flowers that carry the song of the goddess Necace to Heaven: “fair flowers, and fairy! To whose care is given/ to bear the Goddess’ song in odours, up to Heaven – “(80-81). In *Gulisten*, Saadi says, “I saw that my friend had in his skirt collected roses, sweet basil, hyacinth and fragrant herbs with the determination to carry them to town” (12). Poe is seemingly saturated with the fragrance of Saadi’s flowers. Not only had the bulbous plant hyacinth of the lily family may have attracted Poe, but also the poem appears to teem with Saadi’s fragrance of herbs, roses, and dew of flowers.

The sources that enriched Poe’s knowledge about the Middle East are not limited to the Qur’an, the Bible, and Saadi’s *Gulisten*. Eastern books written by English, French, and American writers while traveling in the Middle East were available to Poe, which provided him with a deep understanding of the Middle East. In “The Near East,” Montgomery observes that “Poe never visited the Near East — his knowledge of it essentially came from books, including travel narratives, English translations of Arabic literature, Oriental tales, volumes of Romantic poetry, novels, works of history like

Rollins” (53). The most prominent Middle Eastern books that influenced Poe’s *Al-Aaraaf* are *A Voyage into the Levant* by Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656-1708), *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* by François-René de Chateaubriand, and *Letters from the East* (1826) by John Carne.

Dimness is apparently inspired by John Carne’s *Letters from the East*. In “A New Source of Poe’s ‘Al Aaraaf,’” Kevin J. Hayes argues that the dimness of the moonlight in the poem is an idea that Poe took from his reading of John Carne’s letters while he was travelling in the Middle Eastern countries: Turkey, Egypt, Arabia, the Holy Land, Syria, and Greece (391). Carne’s letters were published three years before the publication of *Al-Aaraaf* which was about 1826 (391). The lack of moonlight in Egypt described in Carne’s letters differs from the passage from Psalms which he quoted. This passage says, “The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night” (Psalms 121.6). Carne wonders about the tradition of avoiding seeing the light of the moon in the night which is “injurious” to the eyes (77). While travelling in a boat up the Nile, Carne found the pleasure in looking at the picturesque exquisitely beautiful landscape along the river. While enjoying the smooth motion of the boat, Carne could not keep away looking at “the calm cloudless moonlight,” but then he was warned by the inhabitants that the moonlight causes potential ill effect to the eyes while looking at it (77). He writes, “the natives tell you, as I found afterwards they also did in Arabia, always to cover your eyes when you sleep in the open air” (7-8). Hence, Carne was surprised by what the native inhabitants of Egypt believed about the moonlight which contradicts the passage of Psalms. He then emphatically and convincingly states that the one who exposed his/her eyes to the moonlight, “would soon be utterly impaired or destroyed” (7-8).

Furthermore, Campbell reinforces Poe's influence by the idea of dimness through his reading of the Scriptures. The nyctalopia or dimness in the poem is expressed in different lines. The creatures in the poem are filled with light, but they do not see clearly the radiance by which they are surrounded: "Bright beings! That ponder, / with half closing eyes" (142-143). Campbell says that Poe may have borrowed the idea of the opacity of light from ancient Egypt. As Campbell has pointed out, Poe quotes a passage in the Scripture shows the rays of sun and moon (186). Poe himself says, "it is perhaps not generally known that the moon, in Egypt, has the effect of producing blindness to those who sleep with the face exposed to its rays, to which circumstance the passage evidently alludes" (Campbell 186). It is clear to see here that Poe gets inspiration about the Middle East from the Scripture as a rich source that portrays the ancient Eastern civilizations and the beliefs that related to them.

By exploring another influential source of *Al-Aaraaf*, intoxication that the honey of the flowers in the city Trebizonde causes is inspired by Moore who had already taken the notion from the book *A Voyage into the Levant*. This book was written by the French botanist Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656-1708) and was published in London in 1741. In *Lalla Rookh*, Moore refers to Tournfort's quotation: "there is a kind of Rhododendros about Trebizonde, whose flowers the bee feeds upon, and the honey thence drives men mad" (Moore 73). Additionally, Poe refers to a flower from the Eastern part of the Mediterranean and calls it "Fior di Levant" (77). Mabbott observes that Poe took this phrase from the French writer François-René de Chateaubriand in his book *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, which means [the flower of the Levant] according to F. Shoberl's translation of *Travels in Greece, Palestine, Egypt, and Barbary* (117). In the book,



Chateaubriand writes, "I subscribe to its appellations of Isola d'oro and Fior de Levante . . . The hyacinth came from Zante, and . . . this island received its name from the flower" (62). Poe used the material more fully in 1836 in his sonnet "To Zante." Mabbott says that the phrases "Isola d'oro Fior de Levant" and "Zante" are Italian words and mean "Island of gold" and "Flower of the Levant" (117).

*Al-Aaraaf* strongly sheds light on the Middle Eastern regions, particularly the ancient ones. Poe refers to the Oriental places at the beginning of the poem: "as those gardens where the day/ springs from the gems of Circassy" (3-4). The region of Circassy is located in North West Caucasus where it is inhabited by a group of Moslem people. It is also the land known for its precious stones and beautiful women. Mabbott explains, "Circassy, or Circassia, the region of the Caucasus whence came the blonde beauties so much admired in Turkey, was also believed to be rich in precious stones" (115). More importantly, the region of "Al-Aaraaf" is metaphorically likened to the region of Circassy. Yother observes *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* by Timothy Marr and says that "the star Al-Aaraaf is compared to 'Circassy,' a region that, as Timothy Marr has recently shown, figured largely in the US literary imagination both in relation to Islam and to an idealized, Edenic understanding of female beauty" ("Desert of the Blest": Poe's Anti-Representational Invocations of the Near East" 56).

Poe also refers to Lemnos as a city regarded within the Islamic world for he relates it to the word "Arabesq" or "Arabseque," which according to Cambridge Dictionaries Online means a type of design based on flowers, leaves, and branches twisted together, found especially in Islamic art ("Arabseque"). Although the city Lemnos is a Greek city today, it was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire in 1574 and

“in the text of 1831 Poe put the word ‘Arabesq’ (sic) in quotation marks, as inappropriate to a Grecian isle” (Mabbott 125-126).

*Al-Aaraaf* refers to most important and ancient cities in the Middle East.

Observing the geography existing outside Poe’s homeland in *Al-Aaraaf*, Yother explains that “tracking the otherworldly locales alluded to in the poem, one finds the entire circuit of the Mediterranean—from Turkey and Greece to the south France North Africa, and Palestine—as well as lands farther afield, such as Persia and India” (“Poe’s Poetry of the Exotic” 25). Poe condenses major regions of the Middle East almost in one passage:

Archaian statues in a world so rich?  
Friezes from Tadmor and Persepolis  
From Balbec, and the stilly, clear abyss  
Of beautiful Gomorrah! O! the wave  
Is now upon thee – but too late to save! – (194-198)

Like *The Doomed City*, Poe, in *Al-Aaraaf*, proves to be interested in the ekphrastic verse where he expresses his appreciation for and wonder about the ancient architectural buildings of ancient civilizations, especially in the Middle East. Montgomery says that Poe, in *Al-Aaraaf*, is interested in “Architectural wonders from the Middle East” (“Turning East: Poe’s 1831 Poems and the Renewal of American Verse” 9). Tadmur, which is located in Syria, is mentioned in the Bible and it also has a historical importance because the Roman Emperor Aurelian in 272 A.D. attacked and completely destroyed the city because of the opposition from the Queen Zenobia. “Tadmor in the wilderness,” Mabbott writes, “was one of the cities built by Solomon, according to I Kings 9:18 and II Chronicles 8:4. It is also called Tamar, ‘place of palms,’ and was the classical Palmyra. It was partially destroyed by the Roman Emperor Aurelian in A. D. 272, after the revolt of

its queen, Zenobia” (121). The Queen of Tadmur, Zanobia, has also a strong presence in Poe’s tale *The Psyche Zenobia* (Sova 82).

Persepolis, the second city referred to in the passage and located in Persia, also has a historical importance. “Persepolis,” Mabbott observes, “was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Persia; the great palace there was burned by Alexander the Great in 330 B. C. Ba” (121). The third ancient and important city in the Middle East is Balbec located in Lebanon. This city was an important center for worshipping the sun and had two tremendous religious buildings. It was destroyed later in 300s A.D. “Ba’albek, the city of the god,” Mabbott has pointed out, “seems to have been a great center of the worship of the Sun from early times. The Greeks called it Heliopolis, and the Romans made it a colony” (121). Two huge temples at the place were finished in the third century of our era” (121). The city also holds a central place in Poe’s tale *In the Silence – a Fable* (121).

The reference to the regions of Gomorrah in Poe’s poem is connected with Sedum and both are believed to be under the Dead Sea. Mabbott says that Poe was acquainted with the Dead Sea and the regions related to it by Chateaubriand’s *Itinéraire* where the French writer mentioned some inexact words in Turkish about the Dead Sea. “The Turks, I am told,” Mabbott explains, “sometimes speak of Ölü deniz, meaning ‘Dead Sea,’ but more usually call it Lut denizi, ‘Lot’s sea.’ For this, the Arabic form is Bahar Loth, now usually written Bahr Lut (‘Sea of Lot’). Another Arabic name for the sea is Al-Buhairah Al-Muntinah,” (122). The second word for the other name of the Dead Sea in the Arabic is Al-Munatanah which has the adjective “natin” which means “to stink” and that is “presumably what Chateaubriand thought he heard during his visit” (122). The

repugnant smell that is understood from the Arabic word for the Dead Sea satisfies Poe's curiosity about the credibility of prophesy related to this city punished by God.

After depicting the cities in Levant and Persia, Poe refers to Iraq or Mesopotamia: "that stole upon the ear, in Eyraco, / of many a wild star-gazer long ago" (201-202). The word "Eyraco," as Mabbott has pointed out, "is obviously an old-fashioned name for Iraq, which embraces ancient Babylonia and Chaldea" (122). Poe here expresses the desire and the delight that the one can find in of Eraco. He says that one can gain great pleasure from being in Eyraco, listening to the low continuous sound of the soft glowing light from the sky when the sun is below the horizon: "sound loves to revel near a summer night/ witness the murmur of the grey twilight" (199-200). The delight of the sound is expressed metaphorically. Poe might here refer to the pleasure of the sounds that come out of the musical instruments which are the lyres for which ancient Iraq was famous. The pleasure of the sound and the enjoyment caused by the beauty of the place in Eraco are intertwined to show Poe's fondness for the civilization of the ancient lands and the tremendous accomplishments it brought to humanity. One of these accomplishments, which drew the attention of the poet, is astrology where he described the people of ancient Iraq as "wild star-gazer" (202). Besides the references to the Middle Eastern ancient cities, Poe is also interested in Christian history, especially the regions in which Christianity began. The reference to the city Trebizond, Yother observes, is made to show the history of Christianity in this city since it "was a successor state to the Byzantine Empire" ("Desert of the Blest': Poe's Anti-Representational Invocations of the Near East" 56).

By exploring the geographical regions of the Middle East in the poem, Poe refers also to an aspect of the climate represented by the strong hot wind known in the Middle East as “Simoom.” This wind, as Mabbott states, is “the destructive wind from Africa, is also mentioned in the 1831 version of ‘Tamerlane,’ line 180” (125). Poe knows of the intensity of the heat of this wind probably through his observation of the extreme degree of the wind in summer as mentioned in Saadi’s *Gulisten*: “It was in Temuz, whose heat dried up the saliva in the mouth and whose simum boiled the marrow in my bones” (134). Temuz is actually the hottest month in most of the Middle Eastern countries and it means July in English which is the seventh month of the year where the wind “simoom” blows and causes high, warm, and sometimes boiling temperature. The word simoom also refers to a wind in Hell as mentioned in the Qu’ran: “And the companions of the left hand (how miserable shall the companions of the left hand be!) shall dwell amidst burning winds, and scalding water, under the shade of a black smoke” (Sale 56.41-43). The word that referred to the burning winds in the Qur’an is “simoom,” and Sale points out that this wind “shall penetrate into the passages of their bodies” (401). Poe here uses the image of this strong and hot wind to describe the metaphorical result that the spirits and the angels would have if they dared to investigate the knowledge of Heaven. Poe employs the power of comets mentioned in the Qur’an to show the power of the wind of simoom: “to them ‘twere the Simoom, and would destroy – / for what [to them] availeth it to know” (324-325). Poe refers to the attempt to know the unknowable that the spirits and angels attempt to investigate as seen in the poem, but they realize that the profound investigation of unknown knowledge is destructive.

In the Qur'an, the scenario of exploring knowledge by humans and jinni (intelligent spirits) is similar to that in Poe's poem: "O ye collective body of genii and men, if ye be able to pass out of the confines of heaven and earth, pass forth: ye shall not pass forth but by absolute power" (Sale 5.33). The kind of power referred to in this verse is the power that is seized by knowledge and it is a clear warning from God that going deeper to knowledge can lead to fatal results: "A flame of fire without smoke, and a smoke without flame shall be sent down upon you; and ye shall not be able to defend yourselves therefrom" (5.35). Being unsuccessful in crossing the barriers of the heaven, humans and genii are deterred from passing the limits of the sky by fire, a fire that is compared to simoom in Poe's poem where the living creatures think they will have if they try to reach the invisible knowledge.

Regarding the ancient regions of the Middle East and the rituals of different religions, Poe alludes to the substance of incense. Poe refers to this substance in the first part of the poem. Incense is a substance burnt for the sweet smell it produces, and Poe relates this substance to religious rituals: "And, amid incense, and high spiritual hymns, / laves in quadruple light her angel limbs" (28-29). In referring to incense, Poe intentionally alludes to the Middle East because incense is a famous Middle Eastern substance. According to Biblical Training, "Incense came from S Arabia [Saudi Arabia] (frankincense, myrrh), Somaliland (frankincense), Palestine (saffron, stacte), Red Sea (onycha), Persia (galbanum), India (nard), and Ceylon (cinnamon)" (sec.4). The exchange in buying and selling this substance was controlled by Arabs (Gen 37:25; 1 Kings 10:10; Ezek 27:22). Abundant profits were gained by exchanging incense, especially in "Sheba and other kingdoms of S [south] Arabia" (sec.4). Besides the

regional importance incense has, this substance also has a historical and religious importance; it was sprayed in the religious temples of the Greek when the ancient Greek leader Alexander the Great headed with huge military forces to invade Babylon (par.2). Incense has a deep history with the rituals of the practices of the religions of the ancient civilizations, such as Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and Phoenician civilizations (par.2). It was also used as a part of the religious and solemn ceremonies of people of Israel in ancient times which covered a large area (par.2). Hence, Poe has a widely-held perception of the importance of incense in the Middle East and its relation to the religious occasions celebrated through the ages. Poe is inclusive in presenting the religious background of different times whether Judean, Christian, Moslem, or even pagan. He makes a vivid and musical image where ritualistic and religious singing are reverberated as if for thousands of years.

Another kind of spiritual hymn in the poem seems to refer to the rituals on a mountain in Lebanon that Poe discusses in his essay "Palestine." In the essay, Poe shows that the mountain might have been a part of the city of Samaria or in Arabic as-Sāmirahin in northern Palestine (*Southern Literary Messenger* 153). But this mountain, Poe remarks, had sacredness for the ancient people of Syria (153). On this mountain an elevated place was built for their religious ceremonies and the sacrifices offered to their god "Carmelus" to show their religious devotion to him (153). This succinctly reflects how Poe is intensely interested in the ancient history of the Levant, especially the history of Syria.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding pages I have documented the central aspects of the Oriental discourse within Poe's four poems. I have also discussed the power of the Qur'anic resonant imagery on these poems, and in particular *Israfel* and *Al-Aaraaf*. I have examined the extent to which the power of the Qur'anic imagery, as a vital element of Orientalism, is reflected on Poe's poems. I explained to what extent each of other aspects of the Oriental discourse plays a key role in setting the framework for Poe's Orientalism, such as exotic features, ancient cities, traditional stories, literary borrowings, and geographical regions. As a result, Poe's *Al-Aaraaf* represents the peak of his knowledge and acquaintance of the Near Orient.

The Qur'anic imagery is an issue at the center of Poe's *Al-Aaraaf*. The vivid and figurative language of the Qur'an is used in different ways. It is mainly used to evoke the feelings of the reader by using arousing poetic images. For example, Poe intelligently selects the situation of men on the purgatory place (Al-Araf) discussed in the Qur'an in order to be in harmony with his theory of poetry. The men on 'Al-Araf' feel cheerful willingness and eagerness to enter Paradise, but they are not allowed. What is more important though for this scene is that it reflects the intensity of excitement that Poe repeatedly emphasizes in his "The Philosophy of Composition" to write well-constructed poems. Like *Al-Aaraaf*, the poems *Israfel*, *To Helen*, and *The Doomed City* are overflowing with the Qur'anic images. And *Al-Aaraaf* although it presents other major aspects of the Orient it discusses the Qur'anic imagery more deeply and accurately.



*Israfel*, is, however, shorter than *Al-Aaraaf*, but they both closely examine the power of the Qur'anic images, especially the use of the apocalyptic verses and the simulacrum for the female virgins in Moslem Paradise. Though Poe misquotes the epigraph in his *Israfel*, this poem has reflected his profound understanding of the Qur'anic story of the angel Israfel. This epigraph is not found in the Qur'an, but it is discussed in George Sale's *The Preliminary Discourse*. This helped to make a strong evidence of Poe's reading of the exegesis of the Qur'an in Sale's book in order to broadly discuss the Qur'anic images invested poetically by Poe.

I have found observing Poe's four poems through the lens of the theory of Orientalism to be worthwhile. It is not the only way to analyze them, but I believe it helps to achieve profound and adequate understanding of each poem. For critics of these poems interested in a broader vision of the role of Orientalism in Poe's poetry, this theory is powerful and valuable to learn of the nature and significance of Orientalism of each poem.

Within Poe's criticism, I would prompt critics to apply the theory of Orientalism to other of Poe's works. Poe's other works are repletet with "oriental inspirations" that can be analyzed within this theory. Some inspirations are noticed in Poe's prose poem *Eureka*, which discusses the origin of the universe, being deeply influenced by the Qur'an. Poe's masterpiece *The Raven* sends out the echo of the sound of the raven in *The Arabian Nights*, *Antar: A Bedoueen Romance*, and *The Story of Layla and Majnun*, which are all possible source materials that must have inspired Poe. A probing question to explore might be: how does the theory of Orientalism operate differently in Poe's short stories? Malini Johar Schueller's discussion about how the representation of the Oriental

discourse operate within the early literary writings of the American authors might be helpful in observing the Orient in Poe's stories. Other questions might include what the other Qur'anic images that influenced Poe in other poems, short stories, or prose essays? Did Eastern literature inspire Poe in other works besides Saadi Shirazi's *Gulisten*? I would also urge critics to read Poe's *Eureka* and *Some Words with a Mummy*, for a broad understanding of the effect of the Qur'anic imagery and the influence by the Egyptology in these two works.

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